

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Southern Liberalism and Its Limits:
Religion, Race, and Appalachian Reform
in the Life of Willis Duke Weatherford, 1875–1970**

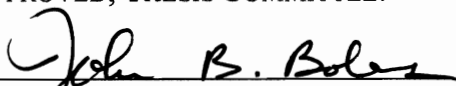
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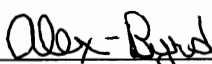
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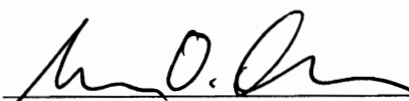
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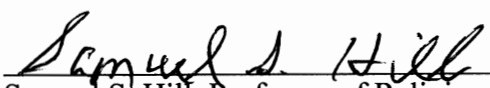
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Southern Liberalism and Its Limits: Religion, Race, and Appalachian Reform in the Life of Willis Duke Weatherford, 1875–1970

by

Andrew McNeill Canady

My dissertation is a contextual biography of a white southern liberal. W. D. Weatherford lived from 1875 to 1970 and played a key role in many of the significant social and political issues of the day, namely race relations, education, religion, and Appalachian reform. He was a pioneer in interracial work in the U. S. South who became involved in 1908 and stayed active in the field through the 1960s. Weatherford also was one of the central figures in the YMCA from 1900 to 1945, a time when this institution wielded strong influence on communities and college campuses in this region and across the country. In the last twenty-five years of his life he primarily addressed Appalachian poverty and this region's religious life.

In the field of southern religious history my study complements other scholarship that contends that a social gospel tradition did not exist in the South. This religious movement appeared in the northern United States in the late nineteenth century, providing a theological critique of social structures in light of new conditions brought on by the urban-industrial revolution. Recently, scholars have questioned to what extent this phenomenon penetrated the South. I argue that Weatherford's activities, while representing a form of socially engaged Christianity, were not a manifestation of that particular movement. For the greater part of his life he never challenged Jim Crow segregation, the structure underlying racism in the United States, nor did he seriously

question the capitalist economy that contributed to the poverty of African Americans and those of Appalachia. In general, he steered clear of politics, concentrating his efforts on the power of education to change the perceptions of people and bring gradual improvement in society.

Weatherford's limitations were also shared with most other white southern progressives of his era, making an analysis of his life an excellent way of illuminating the limits of southern liberalism in general. In particular, I argue Weatherford's southern background, the financial constraints he faced as director of several institutions, the climate of white supremacy in the South, and his religious focus limited how far he pushed for social justice.

Acknowledgements

A dissertation is not the product of only one person's efforts. Throughout graduate school and the process of completing my project I have accumulated numerous debts. To begin with, I would like to thank the Rice History Department for its generous funding, which including a tuition waiver, stipend, and research monies that made this work possible. An Archie K. Davis Fellowship from the North Caroliniana Society also provided financial support for my work. Portions of this dissertation appeared in another form in the *North Carolina Historical Review* and were also presented for a panel at the 2010 Southern Historical Association's annual meeting. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Anne Miller at the *NCHR* as well as Bill Link, Tracy K'Meyer, and the panel audience for their insightful comments and suggestions.

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My graduate colleagues at Rice also aided me along the way. In particular, Luke Harlow and Rusty Hawkins were good friends to me throughout this process and continue to be. Joseph Abel, Jessica Cannon, Chris Davis, Robin Sager, Merritt McKinney, Andy Lang, Blake Ellis, Marty Wauck, Greg Eow, Alyssa Honnette, Wes Phelps, Jim Wainwright, and Allison Madar also were important and supportive through these years. Special thanks is due as well to Randal Hall, managing editor of the *Journal of Southern History*, whose seemingly inexhaustible knowledge has been a constant resource throughout my years at Rice. Numerous visits to his office, countless phone conversations, and his willingness to read portions of my work all helped me as I hit snags along the way and in bringing my overall project together.

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provide professional advice, and write letters of recommendation. I truly appreciate her as both the fine scholar and person she is. Charles Israel also shared his knowledge and interest in early-twentieth-century southern religion and took time to talk in person and reply to my inquiries. Special thanks also must go to Samuel S. Hill. From my start in graduate school Sam has been an unfailing supporter and advocate. Indeed, it was his idea originally to undertake the Weatherford project, and for this suggestion as well as countless meals, conversations, and tours throughout Black Mountain I owe him many thanks. Discussions along the way with Jim Barefield, Mac Bryan, and Donald Mathews also proved helpful.

In the process of my research I had the good fortune to visit with several people who knew Weatherford personally. Thanks go out in particular to Loyal Jones and Billy Edd Wheeler. The Weatherford family has also been very supportive of my research and allowed me both access to personal family documents as well as wonderful hospitality on several occasions. Anne Weatherford consistently made herself and Far Horizons available for my research. Her kindness and openness of mind made these interactions both fruitful and enjoyable. I also appreciate the generosity of Elizabeth Culbreth and John Vanderstar, who opened their beautiful mountain home to me for a research trip, providing me access to materials relating to Weatherford's first wife and her family. Nancy Kester Neale also shared memories of Weatherford and made available documents relating to her father, Howard Kester, which aided in my research.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the numerous people who assisted me in the archives. First and foremost I owe a great debt to the staff of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For

approximately eight months I conducted research there, plodding my way through the fifty boxes of Weatherford's Papers, and various other collections. Laura Brown and Matt Turi in particular were gracious with their time and encouragement during this period and subsequent visits. Becca Soloman, Lauren Hurley, Holly Smith, Biff Hollingsworth, Rachel Canada and others were also helpful, all making my work at Chapel Hill productive and enjoyable. For briefer periods I also went to the archives at Fisk University, Berea College, Vanderbilt University, and the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly. Special thanks to Beth Howse at Fisk for her assistance while I was in Nashville and for her help with follow-up requests. The staffs at the Kautz Family YMCA Archives at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, the Amistad Collection at Tulane University, and the Weatherford Public Library in Weatherford, Texas also were accommodating to my inquiries, copying and mailing documents pertaining to my project.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support I received from my family and friends over the past years. In particular I would like to thank Sam Walton and Gary Cagle. I am also grateful for the constant encouragement I received from my parents, David and Jeanne Canady. It is hard for me to imagine better or more supportive parents. They have continually been at my side as I made my way through graduate school. Thus, this dissertation is dedicated in their honor. It also dedicated to the memory of my brother, Richard Canady, who helped me move to Houston to begin graduate work but never lived to see the completion of my project.

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Introduction

On June 4, 1962, Willis Duke Weatherford at the age of eighty-six received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It was a fitting tribute for a life so involved in many of the most vital concerns of the southern United States, including race relations, religion, education, and the Appalachian region. Born in 1875, Weatherford had matured as Jim Crow came of age, yet Weatherford's life outlived the latter's. Indeed, living until 1970, he saw the end of segregation, witnessing the *Brown* decision and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights acts. In his long career Weatherford stood out as a leader promoting improvement and change in the South. His 1962 honor was the result of a recommendation by his friend and distinguished UNC sociologist, Rupert B. Vance.¹ Of the many accomplishments the degree citation proclaimed, one particular phrase stands out. The document noted that Weatherford had spent his life "Teaching and practicing the social gospel."²

¹ Rupert B. Vance to "The Committee on Honorary Degrees," October 27, 1961, folder 3854, Weatherford Papers. Vance and Weatherford had known each other over the years through YMCA related activities and at the time of Vance's recommendation, Weatherford and he were involved in a survey of the Appalachian region. For more on Vance see Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 302–315. Weatherford went by his initials, W. D.

² A. C. Howell, "Citation for Willis Duke Weatherford on the occasion of his Receiving the Degree of Doctor of Laws," June 4, 1962, folder 3760, Weatherford Papers. Vance's letter to the committee also mentions that Weatherford had "sought simply to apply the social gospel to regional development." See Vance to "Committee on Honorary Degrees," October 27, 1961, folder 3854, Weatherford Papers. Some scholars have even described Weatherford as a "social gospeler." See Ronald C. White, Jr., and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 95; Ronald C. White Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877–1925)* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002 [1990], 66; and Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885–1912* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). Luker never explicitly calls Weatherford a social gospel spokesman but his inclusion of Weatherford in the study implicitly makes this point.

American religious historians have long debated the exact meaning of the “social gospel.”³ Indeed, intellectual historian Paul K. Conkin has described this “label” as “one of the most imprecise in American history,” noting further that “it has impeded the understanding of Church history more than any other simplistic concept.”⁴ In truth, the movement defies easy definition because of the variety of figures associated with it and their wide-ranging ideas and theology; Christianity’s long tradition of social concern and charity; and the fact that social gospel adherents never created an institution or denomination to forward its causes.⁵ Nevertheless, most scholars generally agree that the social gospel was a distinctively American movement that developed in the late nineteenth century when theologians and ministers began offering a new critique of society in the midst of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Figures like Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, and Josiah Strong all criticized the existing economic order, particularly the excesses of capitalism that led to the laboring classes’ deplorable living and working conditions. Writing in 1907 Rauschenbusch—who nearly all historians credit with more “fully represent[ing]” this movement than anyone else—

noted the sense of crisis that urban areas of the United States were in as a result unbridled

³ See Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865–1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949); Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and Yale: Yale University Press, 1972), 785–804; White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*; Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*; White, *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel*; and Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁴ Paul K. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals* (Lanham and other cities: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 63.

⁵ The closest manifestation of an institution promoting this cause was the Federal Council of Churches (founded 1908), but it was more fully connected to the broader ecumenical movement of the twentieth century than the social gospel.

capitalism.⁶ In this period Rauschenbusch recognized the tremendous advances that had been made in “the control of the natural forces” in the nineteenth century, and he envisioned that the twentieth century might be able to do the same for “control of social forces.”⁷ He and other social gospellers of these years imagined that Jesus’s call for the Kingdom of God was not an otherworldly affair, but a goal that people should actively work to bring about on this earth. These spokesmen were in general liberal Christians, very optimistic about the power of their faith tradition to affect the world in the here and now. However, their belief in progress was greatly tempered by World War One, with several important historians of this movement generally declaring its end by the late 1910s.⁸ Thus a traditional interpretation of the social gospel defines it as mainly a northern urban phenomenon, typified by a theological critique of society’s economic and social structures, that was most powerfully manifest from roughly 1880 to 1920.⁹

Yet historians in more recent years have expanded this meaning, causing more confusion in understanding a movement that was already rather nebulous. In 1976 C. Howard Hopkins and a younger scholar, Ronald White, collaborated on a reappraisal of this issue. Their new interpretation challenged Hopkins’s own earlier analysis of the movement, with the new study pushing “the boundaries of the definition of the Social

⁶ See Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1907), particularly chapter five. Rauschenbusch further developed his thoughts on what the social gospel meant in Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912) and Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1917). Quote from Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 785.

⁷ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 421.

⁸ See Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*, 327; and Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 786. Also attesting to this dating is the death of key figures of the movement: Strong (1916); Rauschenbusch (1918), and Gladden (1918).

⁹ These views are generally laid out in Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*; May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*; and Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 785–804.

Gospel in a variety of directions: women as well as men, South and North, rural as well as urban, Catholic and Jewish as well as Protestant.”¹⁰ Moreover, the timing of the movement was also extended, as the authors insisted that “its impact continued long after its demise was forecast following World War I” and that it had reemerged in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.¹¹ Early twentieth-century racial reform efforts in the South on the part of the region’s religious leaders also became classified as social gospel work.¹² While the inclusivity of the new scholarship brought valuable attention to groups and issues previously neglected, the movement became so loosely defined that the distinction between the social gospel and the social application of Christian principles became very blurry.

Among southern religious historians there has been a lively debate over whether a social gospel tradition persisted in their studied region. Hopkins’s original 1940 definition had seemingly left little room for a southern variant of this movement because the South had been largely a rural region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In general historians of the American South have argued that the movement did not exist in the region. Chief among those holding this view has been Samuel S. Hill, who has insisted the “central theme” of southern religion has been the conversion of individuals rather than criticism of “social structures,” the latter being what he considered

¹⁰ See White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, xii; and White, *Liberty and Justice for All*, xii. Quote in White, *Liberty and Justice for All*, xii.

¹¹ White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, xi.

¹² Earlier scholars have previously excluded attention to race as an interest of the social gospel movement. Ahlstrom notes that with the exception of Francis Greenwood Peabody, there was a “prevailing lack of interest in Negro education and racial questions” among social gospel advocates. See Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 795. However new scholarship on this topic began with White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*. Two more extended studies on the subject were published in the early 1990s, White, *Liberty and Justice for All*; and Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*. Both recent books included an attention to African Americans practicing the social gospel as well.

the essence of the social gospel.¹³ In his influential book *Southern Churches in Crisis* (1966), written in the midst of the civil rights movement, Hill reproached white southern Protestant churches for their lack of social interest, particularly in regard to confronting segregation. Hill offered a helpful image showing the general attitudes of the region's white Christians in regard to race relations with the following description: "The white Christian's duty toward the Negro, as seen by the southern church, is to convert him and befriend him (in a paternal framework), not to consider altering the social traditions and arrangements which govern his (and everyone else's) life to so significant a degree."¹⁴ Historian John B. Boles has also contributed to this scholarly conversation, agreeing with Hill's assessment that southern religion has primarily concentrated on conversion rather than addressing societal concerns and criticizing the structures that lead to injustice.¹⁵ Boles recognizes a few "clerical radicals" have existed on the margins of southern religion, but he correctly notes their impact has never been large and that this spirit certainly has not typified southern religious life.¹⁶ Thus, while neither Boles nor Hill

¹³ See Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1999 [1966]), 73 and 171.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, lxvi.

¹⁵ See John B. Boles, "The Discovery of Southern Religious History," in John B. Boles, and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 540; and John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region*, volume 2 (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 448. In the discussion of southern Progressivism in the latter he notes "Religious leaders dispensed charity to the destitute and battled such enemies of moral behavior as the whiskey distillers, though unlike northern Social Gospel ministers, they seldom constructed a theological critique of the social institutions that produced or allowed poverty and injustice."

¹⁶ Boles, "Discovery of Southern Religious History," 540. As Boles discusses Flynt's scholarship on the social gospel he admits that "occasionally" some "southern evangelicals protested some forms of economic and racial oppression." However, as Boles responds to Flynt's argument that social involvement in such issues as Prohibition and urban relief work represent the social gospel tradition in the South, Boles insists these instances "represent traditional church charity of a type many centuries older than the social gospel." See p. 543. For examples of the limited radical tradition in southern religion see Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929–1959* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981); Robert F. Martin, *Howard Kester and the Struggle for Social Justice in the South, 1904–77* (Charlottesville and London, 1991); Tracey Elaine K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in*

discount that there have been instances of social concern among southern evangelicals, their essential argument is that this has not been the overwhelming tendency of this region's religious impulse.

Other southern scholars have produced studies illuminating southern religion's societal concern, sometimes referring to this work as a manifestation of the "social gospel" and at other times using the broader term "social Christianity." Wayne Flynt has perhaps been the most vocal proponent of this perspective, emphasizing the existence of social concern of urban ministers and congregations in Alabama.¹⁷ More recently John Patrick McDowell, Keith Harper, Paul Harvey, and Charles Israel have also provided analysis of other forms of socially engaged Christian work.¹⁸

As in the case of many scholarly quarrels perhaps this disagreement is really a matter of emphasis. Certainly there were figures in the South who because of their Christian faith engaged society and critiqued its structures. Undoubtedly this group was also extremely small and unrepresentative of the region's religious culture. While Hill and Boles's argument that southern religion's chief concern has been on conversion and

the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997); and David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

¹⁷ See Wayne Flynt, "One in the Spirit, Many in the Flesh: Southern Evangelicals," in David Edwin Harrell, Jr., ed., *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981), 23–44; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 251–398; and Wayne Flynt, "'Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Broken Hearted': The Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Social Gospel, 1900–1920," in Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *Religion in the South* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1985), 83–137.

¹⁸ See John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886–1939* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Keith Harper, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890–1920* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865–1925* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Charles A. Israel, *Before Scopes: Evangelicalism, Education, and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870–1925* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004). Harper also provides a helpful historiographical discussion of the debate surrounding the existence of a southern social gospel. See p. 1–14.

personal morality is very persuasive, these other historians advocating for a southern social gospel illuminate exceptions to this trend. Indeed, understanding these more progressive religious figures and the spectrum of views they held remains important for the study of southern religion. Their significance is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that the South's deep-seated conservatism—religious, social, and political—created an environment that did not easily allow for people to question the status quo. This truth also makes assessing these forward thinking religious figures complex. In some southern circles, those progressives who challenged southern traditions were seen as liberals, some even as radicals, when in the national context they were hardly more than moderates. These figures, particularly those motivated by religious beliefs, in a region without a tradition of doing so, warrant attention. The complexity of their thoughts, and the compromises and sacrifices they made to their beliefs in this process illuminate the difficulty of being a liberal—in the broad, open-minded sense of the term—in the South in the twentieth century.

This study examines one of these exceptions in southern society through an analysis of W. D. Weatherford. A committed Methodist and a worker in the southern YMCA, Weatherford exemplifies this lesser-known strand of southern religious life. Growing out of his Christian faith, he directed more of his attention to correcting the problems of society than to converting people. Without a doubt he still wanted people to be Christians, but it was more important that they live what he considered to be “Christian” lives—which he envisioned to mean personal activities as well as social. Though the definition of the social gospel remains contested, I basically understand it in the way that Boles and Hill do, as a theological criticism of society's economic and social

structures. While Weatherford certainly recognized and sought to alleviate problems in the South, particularly in respect to race relations and poverty, he never leveled a critique of the structures that created these problems. For most of his life he did not seek to end Jim Crow segregation nor did he strongly question America's capitalist economy. Instead, he remained a gradualist throughout, relying most heavily on the belief that education would bring change over time. While he did work with institutions and to a very limited degree get involved in politics, his real focus always remained with individuals. Weatherford largely tried to change the attitudes of ambitious and bright white southerners, hoping they would transform the region through their lives and leadership in the future. He never exhibited the sense of crisis that Rauschenbusch offered in his writings.¹⁹ As for the Kingdom of God, Weatherford seems certainly to have desired this vision on earth, and in many ways worked toward it, but again the urgency of this hope was not as evident in Weatherford as in Rauschenbusch.²⁰ In his Appalachian religious work Weatherford did not advocate overthrowing capitalism;

¹⁹ Weatherford did read Rauschenbusch however. See Weatherford's 1916 marked copy of Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York and London: Association Press, 1916), Record Group No. 9, Box 5, folder 8, W. D. Weatherford collection, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

²⁰ Weatherford only mildly supported radical southern groups that might best be identified with a southern social gospel, specifically the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, Koinonia Farm, and Highlander Folk School. In 1942 Weatherford described the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen's "policy" as "good" but did "not think they ha[d] ever done any remarkable things." See W. D. Weatherford to Ivan Lee Holt, February 6, 1942, folder 2923, Weatherford Papers. In 1958 Weatherford gave the group a \$10 donation. See receipt, December 26, 1958, folder 3729, Weatherford Papers. The extent to which Weatherford supported the interracial farm community Koinonia near Americus, Georgia is not known but co-founder of the group, Martin England (a former Blue Ridge summer worker) and Clarence Jordan, did make plans to visit Weatherford in the fall of 1942 to brief Weatherford on the plans for the newly-organized project. See Martin England to W. D. Weatherford, October 12, 1942, folder 2871, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford also seems to have had little connection to Highlander. In 1959, in the midst of that organization's struggles to stay alive, Weatherford inquired to his long-time friend and Tennessee resident Robert Eleazer about the "low-down" on the school, noting "If they are really doing a first class job, I would not want to miss the chance to help them a little, but if, on the other hand, there are questionable things going on there, I would not want to risk my money on it. I do not know the facts and I am open-minded on it." See W. D. Weatherford to Robert Eleazer, September 8, 1959, folder 3828, Weatherford Papers. See also John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932-1962* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

rather, he wanted mountain congregations to be more socially engaged in their region. Overall, it is not appropriate to describe Weatherford as a “social gospeler.” Instead, it is better to think of his activities as a form of socially engaged Christianity, where his religious beliefs led him into societal concerns. In short, Weatherford’s life represents more of an interest in how people lived their Christian lives than simply whether their souls were saved.²¹ He was interested in social action and results, a fact that placed him outside the mainstream of southern religious life and tradition.

Nevertheless, Weatherford’s interest in reform in the South did put him among a small group of like-minded progressives in this region at this time. These “southern liberals” were largely middle and upper-class whites in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century—many of them religiously motivated—who sought to improve this region. In particular, the key issue they had to confront was race. Morton Sosna, who has provided an excellent study of this subject, defines the group as:

those white Southerners who perceived that there was a serious maladjustment of race relations in the South, who recognized that the existing system resulted in grave injustices for blacks, and who either actively endorsed or engaged in programs to aid Southern blacks in the fight against lynching, disenfranchisement, segregation, and blatant discrimination in such areas as education, employment, and law enforcement.²²

Weatherford fits nicely into this definition, along with others like Edgar Gardner Murphy, Lily Hardy Hammond, William Louis Poteat, Howard A. Odum, Will W. Alexander, Jessie Daniel Ames, William T. Couch, and Arthur F. Raper. However, prior to the 1950s he and many of these white liberals stopped short of truly denouncing Jim Crow

²¹ Neither is it fitting to think of Weatherford as a “clerical radical.” In the context of his day he would certainly have been seen as liberal politically, and to some extent theologically, but he was by no means radical like Howard Kester or Clarence Jordan.

²² Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), viii.

segregation. The extent to which Weatherford called for change in race relations—and later the conditions of the southern Appalachian region—reveals much about the limits of southern liberalism at this time.²³

What makes Weatherford even more interesting in respect to these other liberals is that his life spans such a wide breadth of time, having an active career from roughly 1900 to 1965. Raised in the small town of Weatherford, Texas, Weatherford attended junior college there before going to Vanderbilt University, where he ultimately received his Ph.D. in literature in 1907. While completing his dissertation in 1902 he became a YMCA secretary, traveling throughout the South speaking and working with college students. Growing out these experiences, and in the wake of the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, Weatherford began directing his attention increasingly toward improving race relations between southern whites and blacks. This work largely fell along the lines of educational efforts through books he wrote for YMCA study programs and interracial conferences.²⁴ Weatherford also took an active role in emerging interracial organizations in this period, working with the Southern Sociological Congress from its beginning in

²³ For other studies about southern liberalism see Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal: Intolerance and Intellectual Leadership in the South, 1890–1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Singal, *The War Within*; and John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

²⁴ Growing out of a small interracial gathering in Atlanta in 1908, Weatherford published *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions and Needs* (New York: Association Press, 1910) and later *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (New York: Association Press, 1912). Weatherford continued to publish books and articles on the subject through the 1930s. See W. D. Weatherford, “Race Relationship in the South,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (Sept., 1913); W. D. Weatherford, ed., *Interracial Cooperation: A Study of the Various Agencies Working in the Field of Social Welfare* (Published by Interracial Committee of the War Work Council of YMCA, 1920); W. D. Weatherford, *The Negro From Africa to America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924); W. D. Weatherford, ed., *A Survey of the Negro Boy in Nashville, Tennessee* (New York: Association Press, 1932); W. D. Weatherford, “Changing Attitudes of Southern Students,” *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (April, 1933); and W. D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson, *Race Relations: Adjustment of Whites and Negroes in the United States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1934);

1912 and helping to found the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) in 1919. In 1912 Weatherford began operating a YMCA conference center (the Blue Ridge Assembly), to serve white southern college students. While similarly-styled YMCA retreat centers existed in other parts of the country in this period, Weatherford thought it important to have a meeting place located in the South and focused on this region's specific issues—particularly the “race problem” as it was called at that time. Blue Ridge became a unique space where the subject of race could be discussed and even to a limited degree where whites and blacks could meet. Indeed, beginning in 1919 and extending onward, Blue Ridge hosted African American speakers for its summer conferences and included a small number of black YMCA student delegates. Moreover, the center became the site of important conferences on lynching as well as a site for interracial meetings.²⁵ While the Blue Ridge approach was gradualist, it was one of the few places in the South where such events and conversations could occur at this time.

Except for limited attention in greater studies of the YMCA, the history of the Y in the South remains basically untold.²⁶ While the full account of this institution's southern history cannot be related here, this dissertation begins the process. Despite this organization's own limits in the early twentieth century, the YMCA was important force in promoting progressive causes in the South.²⁷ Indeed, most state and private higher

²⁵ Willis Duke Weatherford, ed., *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Held at Blue Ridge, N.C., August 4th, 5th, and 6th, Nineteen Hundred and Seventeen* (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917).

²⁶ See Sherwood Eddy, *A Century With Youth: A History of the Y.M.C.A. from 1844 to 1944* (New York: Association Press, 1944); C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951); Nina Mjagkij, *Light in Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852–1946* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); and David P. Setran, *The College “Y”: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁷ John Egerton has noted this tendency. He writes “The YMCA and YWCA were among the first church-related agencies to address social concerns. Many of the Southerners who yearned to do something about

education institutions had college YMCAs on their campuses in this period. Moreover, it seems clear that through Weatherford's varied work in the Y he had an important impact on those persons who came of age in the 1920s and 1930s and who began to attack racial and labor problems of that era. Noted figures like Howard A. Kester, Myles Horton, Don West, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, and Frank Porter Graham became important southern liberals (and some even radical) in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and all had roots in the southern YMCA and contact with Weatherford.²⁸

In the midst of Weatherford's work at Blue Ridge, he was also involved in a series of other ventures. In 1915 he joined the board of trustees of Berea College in Kentucky. This school had a long heritage of religious and interracial education, manual labor, and attention to the Appalachian region dating back to the school's founding in 1855. Weatherford remained involved with this school until the end of his life, with his son eventually becoming president there in 1967.²⁹

Other initiatives also held Weatherford's attention. Beginning in 1919 Weatherford created and operated a graduate school for the professional training of southern YMCA leaders. The Southern College of the YMCA (later renamed the YMCA Graduate School) was operated adjacent to Vanderbilt University, having an intimate relationship with that institution as well as connections to Scarritt College for Christian Workers, George Peabody College for Teachers, and the African American Fisk

race relations in the twentieth century—and almost all of the ones who had strong religious ties—could trace their awakening in some degree to the exposure they got at the Y.” Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 426.

²⁸ See Martin, *Howard Kester*, 20–22; Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School*, 17; Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991 [1946]), 178–80, 189–93, and 197–239; and Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 49, and 116–17.

²⁹ Shannon H. Wilson, *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 161.

University—all located in Nashville. Weatherford remained the school's president until 1936 when it closed because of financial problems. Leaving that task, he turned his attention to Fisk University from 1936 to 1946, working as a professor in its Department of Religion and Humanities and as a fundraiser. From there he shifted his efforts full-time to Berea, working to help with student recruitment and institutional development. Moreover, he increasingly labored to improve the Appalachian region—a section of the country gaining national attention at the time for its poverty and underdevelopment. Weatherford wrote several books about this area and its religious traditions and contributed to a survey of the region financed by the Ford Foundation.³⁰ Throughout his life he cultivated friendships and contacts with a number of prominent southern white and black leaders including Booker T. Washington, Robert Russa Moton, John Hope, Will Alexander, Jessie Daniel Ames, Mary McLeod Bethune, George Washington Carver, Frank Porter Graham, Howard A. Odum, Arthur F. Raper, and Rupert B. Vance. As a result of his prominent place in addressing southern social issues, it is clear that examining Weatherford provides a window into understanding the subjects of race, religion, and education in the South in this dynamic period of the twentieth century.

Weatherford's approach to improving the South is most adequately defined as liberal. From the time he entered YMCA work at the turn of the twentieth century to the end of his life, he always remained optimistic about the future and believed in progress.

³⁰ See Thomas R. Ford, ed., *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1962); W. D. Weatherford, ed., *Educational Opportunities in the Appalachian Mountains* (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 1955); W. D. Weatherford, ed., *Religion in the Appalachian Mountains: A Symposium* (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 1955); W. D. Weatherford, *Pioneers of Destiny: The Romance of the Appalachian People* (Birmingham, AL: Vulcan Press, Inc., 1955); W. D. Weatherford and Earl D. C. Brewer, *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia: An Interpretation of Selected Data from the Southern Appalachian Studies* (New York: Friendship Press, 1962).

In the concern of race relations he was a gradualist, and he only came to denounce segregation explicitly after 1957. For the most part, prior to that time, he was interested in alleviating the faults of that social system and eliminating the violence that occurred within it. In these years he also worked to expose white college students to leading African Americans. His general philosophy was that education and personal experience would change individual lives. These young white men and women would become future southern leaders who would affect change in their own communities, which in turn would improve the South as a whole. Like many southern reformers of this era, Weatherford was motivated by a deep Christian faith. Yet what makes Weatherford different from most of his contemporaries was that as time passed, his ideas on Jim Crow shifted. Indeed, in his 1957 book *American Churches and the Negro* he called for churches to be at the forefront of desegregation.³¹ Living through so many political and social changes, Weatherford strikingly was able to evolve on this key issue.

Weatherford's life has received limited attention with varying degrees of analytical rigor. Wilma Dykeman's *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (1966) offered the first and remains the only full-scale treatment of Weatherford. In order to access her biography, it is important to understand Dykeman's purpose for the book and the context in which it was written. Dykeman was a novelist and amateur historian in this period and had produced several semi-scholarly works, including a biography of Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) leader and New

³¹ W. D. Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro: An Historical Study From Early Slave Days to the Present* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1957).

Deal figure, Will W. Alexander.³² In the midst of Weatherford's attention to the Appalachian region in the early 1960s, he commissioned her to write his own biography using funds from the Southern Appalachian Studies project he was leading at the time.³³ Thus she wrote with the purpose of advocating for the needs of Appalachia within the larger national War on Poverty campaign. Dykeman's source base was heavily reliant on interviews with Weatherford and upon answers that Weatherford wrote to questions she prepared.³⁴ Thus, *Prophet of Plenty* was written with the particular intention of bringing interest to Appalachia and inspiring people through the "exemplary" life of Weatherford. Overall, Dykeman argues that Weatherford's life was one spent addressing both physical and spiritual poverty, and she contends that Weatherford's philosophy of life and his way of living point to the potential for both physical and spiritual plenty.

There have also been more scholarly treatments of Weatherford, those written by George Peter Antone, Jr. and Sara Trowbridge Combs.³⁵ Both works essentially focus on

³² Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962). Dykeman and her husband Stokely also produced a journalistic type report in the late 1950s after traveling throughout the South and interviewing people about the 1954 *Brown* decision and race. See Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, *Neither Black nor White* (New York and Toronto: Rinehart and Company, 1957).

³³ See correspondence between Weatherford and Dykeman in folder 3573, Southern Appalachian Studies (1966): General Correspondence, N-W, Weatherford Papers.

³⁴ At the Weatherford family home, Far Horizons, there are several of W. D. Weatherford's personal notebooks where he apparently wrote answers to questions that Dykeman posed to him as she was researching his life. See unpaginated notebooks entitled "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64; "College Life and Main Objectives of Work since College at Vanderbilt;" "Need for Study of Religion etc. in Appalachia;" "Growing Up in Weatherford, Texas;" "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors;" "all in Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina. Based on his responses and the markings in these notebooks, it appears Weatherford sent these to Dykeman when she was writing *Prophet of Plenty*, and then she later returned them. At times she pulls directly from his written words for her book. Far Horizons is now occupied by Weatherford's daughter-in-law, Anne Weatherford who made these documents available. See also Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, June 1, 1966, folder 3573, Weatherford Papers.

³⁵ See George Peter Antone, Jr., "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906-1946" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969); and Sara Trowbridge Combs, "Race Reform in the Early Twentieth Century South: The Life and Work of Willis Duke Weatherford" (master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2004).

his efforts in race relations. Examining Weatherford's career until 1946, Antone's excellent dissertation argues that he was "a moderate and a paternalist" yet also recognizes that Weatherford was a "pioneer" for his time.³⁶ Antone's source base for the project was confined primarily to documents Weatherford made available, interviews with the subject, and correspondence held at Vanderbilt and Fisk's respective libraries.³⁷ His work also briefly extends beyond the subject of race, examining the importance and history of the YMCA Graduate School.³⁸ Following Weatherford's death in 1970, Weatherford's papers were deposited at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For his dissertation (1969) Antone would not have had access to all of these materials. Combs's recent master's thesis makes selected use of these papers and extends her treatment of Weatherford's involvement in race relations through the late 1950s. Her work complements, rather than challenges, Antone's assessment of Weatherford's race relations work, but she places Weatherford more in the context of the Progressive movement. Besides these three focused works, Weatherford's activities have also received brief recognition by other scholars as part of their larger works.³⁹ The general consensus among the scholarly community is that

³⁶ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 225.

³⁷ George P. Antone to W. D. Weatherford, February 20, 1966, folder 3890, Weatherford Papers; George P. Antone to W. D. Weatherford, [1967], folder 3901, Weatherford Papers; and George P. Antone to W. D. Weatherford, May 20, 1967, folder 3901, Weatherford Papers.

³⁸ See Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," chapter 5, "Y.M.C.A. Graduate School," and George P. Antone, "The Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Nashville, 1919–1936" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32 (Spring–Winter 1973).

³⁹ See Dykeman and Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change*, 24, 45, 59, 63, and 66; George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 176–78; Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York, 1977), 16–18, 20–22, 77; Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929–1959* (Charlottesville, 1981), 21–22; Linda McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (New York and Oxford, 1981), 35, 201–202, and 206; Robert F. Martin, *Howard Kester and the Struggle for Social Justice in the South, 1904–77* (Charlottesville and London, 1991), 22, 25–26; David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore and London, 1994), 35; and John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the*

Weatherford—while a forward-thinking white southerner for his time—was essentially a moderate, benevolent paternalist.

This study intends to move the conversation in a different direction. In the process of providing the first comprehensive scholarly assessment of Weatherford, it situates him among southern liberals of his era and the limits of their reform activities. As a result, context is very important, and this project seeks to understand Weatherford's actions within what remained possible at the time. This study also emphasizes that the overriding theme tying Weatherford's life together was his Protestant Christian faith. His religious beliefs motivated his actions in all areas he entered, be it race, education, or the Appalachian region.

In truth, understanding how his religion influenced him is key to appreciating the limits to his liberalism. Throughout Weatherford's career his Christian faith both propelled his social engagement as well as constrained it. For him, the religious message included both a concern for personal faith and salvation as well as an interest in social problems.⁴⁰ Being true to Jesus' example and active in society was just as or more important as particular beliefs. Yet the extent to how far Weatherford would go in making changes always had boundaries. He would not sacrifice his overall Christian emphasis for any particular social issue. Another significant conviction Weatherford held was that each individual, regardless of skin color or personal wealth, had worth, an idea he expressed in the phrases "the sacredness of personality" and "the dignity of all

Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (New York: Knopf, 1994) 44–48, 74, 77, 122–23, 130, 159, 175, and 426; and Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 66–67.

⁴⁰ Toward the end of his life Weatherford remarked that "The Lord almighty does not need the things you and I can do except he needs to have them done for one of his children." See Weatherford, "College Life and Main Objectives," Weatherford family papers.

persons.” These views helped bring him to address African American injustice as well as Appalachian poverty. Yet, in some ways Weatherford’s emphasis on the individual prevented him from tackling larger structural issues.

Weatherford’s liberalism was also restricted in other ways. Not only was Weatherford’s social conscience a result of his religious faith, it was also pushed forward by his intellectual development. Yet despite these forces that moved him into progressive directions and causes, he was at the same time constrained by the past. The South had no major social gospel tradition for him to draw on, perhaps preventing him from thinking in terms of structural critiques. Weatherford was also unable to his escape the times in which he lived, particularly on race, and in his desire for pragmatic results, he made compromises. His southern birth, his nostalgia for the Old South and the people of the Appalachian region; the financial constraints he faced as director of several institutions; the climate of white supremacy in the South; and his religious focus kept him within certain boundaries, limiting how far he pushed for equality and fair treatment of African Americans and the people of the Appalachian region. Because the constraints he worked under were similar to those of other leading liberals of this section of the country, his life reveals much about southern liberalism and its limits from 1900 to 1965.

Chapter 1—The Making of a Southern Liberal: From Weatherford, Texas, to Nashville, Tennessee, 1875–1907

“I was never a drifter—I have steered not drifted.”¹ In 1964 W. D. Weatherford wrote these words as he pondered over nearly ninety years of living. Yet even amid a life so directed and focused, numerous changes took place. Perhaps the most dramatic transformation occurred in the first third of his life as his formal education and worldly experience shaped how he understood the world. In this period he moved from holding a provincial small-town worldview to becoming a “southern liberal” for his time.² Weatherford’s liberalism was not only evident in his progressive views on race—a central point that defined southerners who fit this label in this era—but also in his more modern religious views. Weatherford’s gradual awakening was brought on by his intellectual curiosity and development, urban living, interaction with African Americans, and a questioning of religious faith.

W. D. Weatherford was born December 1, 1875, in Weatherford, Texas, a small town about thirty miles west of Ft. Worth.³ Weatherford was the seventh of the eight

¹ See unpaginated notebook titled “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

² Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), viii. See also Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 452–473; Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal: Intolerance and Intellectual Leadership in the South, 1890–1914* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

³ For information on Weatherford, Texas see David Minor, “Weatherford, Texas,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/hew3.html>, accessed 2-10-2010. There has been some confusion whether or not this town was named for one of W. D. Weatherford’s ancestors. Wilma Dykeman insists that it was named for Samuel Leonard’s older brother William. See Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 14. However, Minor’s article on the town’s history declares it was named for Jefferson Weatherford (1810-1867), a Texas state senator who had helped write the bill establishing Parker County, of which Weatherford became the county seat when it was incorporated in 1859. According to an

children of Samuel Leonard and Margaret Jane Turner Weatherford.⁴ His father (born November 9, 1829) was born in Virginia before moving on to Tennessee and finally settling in Texas.⁵ His mother was born January 20, 1837, in the small mountain community of Crawfish Springs, Georgia.⁶ In her youth her family also moved to Texas, where at some point she met Samuel, and the two were married between 1856 and 1857.⁷

The early years of their marriage were not easy. The young couple moved several times, first living two years in Tarrant County near Ft. Worth and then heading west to the vicinity of Ft. Griffin.⁸ Samuel Weatherford worked in the cattle business during this period, at times leaving his young wife to drive these animals to market.⁹ In these years they were living on what was the Texas frontier, at the farthest edges of where white settlers had moved. For such newcomers this setting was harsh and at times dangerous. Conflicts developed between whites and Native Americans as the former pushed further west. During the Civil War, Samuel Weatherford served as an "Indian fighter to protect

interview with Samuel Leonard Weatherford for a local newspaper story in 1910, Jefferson Weatherford was his cousin. See R. K. Phillips, "Sketches from Life," February 18, 1910, Weatherford *Democrat*, photograph copy of clipping in Weatherford family vertical file, Weatherford Public Library, Weatherford, Texas.

⁴ See "Family Record," folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. Only seven of these children lived past childhood. The second child, Samuel Leonard Jr., born in 1861 died sometime in his first year as the result of burns. Margaret Weatherford lost three other children at birth but these were not named.

⁵ See "Family Record," folder 3720, Weatherford Papers; and untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. These notes probably were written by Flora Weatherford, W. D.'s older sister (born 1867) with whom he maintained in the closest contact of his siblings after leaving Texas. Her information conflicts somewhat with W. D.'s later memories of his parents' backgrounds, but this may be slightly due to some confusion on his part because of his age at the time. Weatherford notes that his father was born near Bristol, Tennessee which is near the Tennessee/Virginia border. See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁶ Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford notes she also lived in Yancey County, North Carolina at some point where she took the only six months of formal schooling she ever received. However the exact location and dates of her residence in North Carolina are unknown. Weatherford also insists both his parents were of Scotch-Irish descent, a point that he later emphasized in his involvement with Appalachian reform. See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁷ Flora to W. D. Weatherford, n.d., folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

⁸ Untitled genealogy notes, p. 3, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

⁹ *Ibid.*

his own family and the frontier settlements,” likely serving in the Second Frontier District of Texas.¹⁰ Little is known of his activities with this group, other than family reports that he fought in the “Battle of Concho Creek.”¹¹ Therefore in the first decade of Samuel and Margaret’s marriage, Samuel was often away from his wife for extended periods.

According to other family memories, his wife faced several Indian raids during these absences. These events—along with frequent pregnancies, the loss of several children, and the fear of other impending conflicts—placed a heavy burden of stress on Margaret in these years of their marriage. Her first pregnancy, within two years of their nuptials, had ended in a premature birth.¹² Following that tragedy, according to later recollections from her daughter Flora, Margaret “bore children very rapidly—too rapidly for any woman’s health.”¹³ In 1861 her third child, Samuel Leonard, Jr., died in his first year due to complications from being burned.¹⁴ Thus these personal tragedies, intensified by the dangerous and lonely living conditions of the frontier, put such a strain on Margaret that she had a “nervous breakdown” in the mid-1860s.¹⁵ Seeking to provide greater safety and more stability, the Weatherfords purchased a home and began farming in the recently

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2+; and David Paul Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas’ Rangers and Rebels* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1992), 151.

¹¹ Untitled genealogy notes, p. 2+, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. The writer is likely referring to the Battle of Dove Creek, January 8, 1865, that took place near San Angelo when Confederate soldiers and Texas state militiamen combined to attack Kickapoo Indians. Since W. D. Weatherford never makes mention of his father being a Confederate, it is most likely Samuel Weatherford served in the state militia during the Civil War. See Elmer Kelton, “Battle of Dove Creek,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/btd1.html>, accessed 2-10-2010; and Smith, *Frontier Defense*, 151–155.

¹² Flora to Weatherford, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See untitled genealogy notes, p. 4, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers; and “Family Record,” folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. According to Flora, a spark from the fireplace likely flew into the crib, setting it and the child aflame while his parents were out retrieving water for the home.

¹⁵ Flora to Weatherford, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

organized town of Weatherford, Texas, sometime between the fall of 1866 and spring of 1867.¹⁶

When the Weatherfords arrived there the town (incorporated 1858) was in its first decade of existence and still remained the “principal frontier settlement in North Texas.”¹⁷ At this time it would have fit well with historian Robert Wiebe’s characterization of a provincial “island community” because of its local focus, isolation, size, and lack of transportation networks.¹⁸ However, changes were taking place in the coming years that were shifting the character of this town like so many others across America. In 1880 the Texas and Pacific Railway came to the city, with the Santa Fe line reaching there in 1887.¹⁹ These railroads, along with local extensions, helped to connect Weatherford with larger markets and the greater world. They also helped to build Weatherford into a hub for farmers and cattlemen as well as for local businesses. By the 1890s, three newspapers, three banks, four hotels, several churches and schools (including Weatherford College), and roughly 100 businesses served this thriving small city of 5,000 people. Thus by the time W. D. was in his teenage years, the town while still relatively small and provincial, had grown and matured.

Racially, Weatherford like the rest of Parker County was made up mostly of whites in the late 1800s. The county had been created in 1855, and a limited number of slaves remained there between its founding and the end of the Civil War.²⁰ In 1860, 300

¹⁶ See Flora to Weatherford, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers; and untitled genealogy notes, p. 4, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷ Minor, “Weatherford, Texas,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹⁸ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), xiii.

¹⁹ Minor, “Weatherford, Texas,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*.

²⁰ Jeri Echeverria, “Parker County,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/hcp3.html>, accessed 3-3-10; and Deborah Liles, “Inventing the Past: How Historiography Contributes to Deceptions in Small Communities,” paper

slave owners in the county held 341 slaves, the latter making up roughly 8 percent of Parker County's total population.²¹ In 1870, following emancipation and the end of the Civil War, 293 African Americans lived in the county, accounting for 7 percent of the entire population of 4,186.²² Thus W. D. Weatherford likely had only a small degree of exposure to African Americans in his youth and would have had little, if any, contact with college educated or professional blacks.²³ In short, his background was not conducive to a progressive stance on race, and the negative stereotypes that many white southerners applied to this group would have been easy for him to accept.

As the Weatherfords were settling into this small Texas town, the South was in the midst of Reconstruction, with images of the Civil War still close in the minds of many white southerners. This was a time of readjustment and starting over. However, since Weatherford's father had fought with the frontier forces rather than with those of the Confederacy, it is likely that the war did not hold such a prominent place in his memory or in his family's. Nevertheless Texas, like the rest of the South, was in the process of rebuilding in this period and accepting slavery's end. With the addition of railroad networks in the town and the growth of business, Weatherford was also entering the New South in these years. Along with the economic changes taking place, important alterations in the political and social spheres were also occurring. By the time of Weatherford's birth in 1875, Reconstruction was nearing its formal end (1877), and over

presented to Parker County History and Heritage, Inc., Weatherford, Texas, January 19, 2010. Photocopy of paper in possession of author. Liles is a Ph. D. candidate in history at the University of North Texas, and this work is part of her dissertation.

²¹ Liles, "Inventing the Past," p. 5–6.

²² Echeverria, "Parker County," *The Handbook of Texas Online*.

²³ The only mention of contact with African Americans during Weatherford's youth comes from his sister Virginia, who recalls listening to a black preacher near their home. See untitled genealogical notes, p. 4, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

the coming years whatever flexibility African Americans had had in this small town and across the South had begun to tighten.²⁴ Laws increasingly restricted the lives of this minority group and narrowed their political participation. Indeed, as W. D. grew, so too did the spread of segregation laws. By the time Weatherford was twenty years old, violence against blacks was rising in the South and the region was truly entering the “nadir of race relations.”²⁵ Thus Weatherford matured in a segregated world, and this context, along with his limited interaction with African Americans in his youth, deeply affected how he initially viewed the status and potential of this group.

The intellectual and religious world in which Weatherford developed was also largely circumscribed. It is apt to describe this atmosphere as Victorian.²⁶ Historian Daniel Singal in his study of the South’s shift from Victorian to Modernist culture describes the former as one with “a world view of radical innocence,” and “a world governed by moral purity” that praised “material success,” “diligence and practicality,” and that had an outlook of “steadfast optimism.”²⁷ Weatherford’s childhood and youth reflected these values. For the most part in his early years his life was sheltered, his family focusing on religion, hard work, and respectability. The Weatherfords were Methodist, and W. D. would also maintain this denominational affiliation throughout his lifetime. During his childhood and teenage years Weatherford remained active in the Methodist Church, attending Sunday school and worship services, and was largely

²⁴ See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

²⁵ John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region*, vol. 2, 3rd ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 467.

²⁶ For Victorianism see Singal, *War Within*, 3–33.

²⁷ Singal, *War Within*, 7 and 23.

insulated from life's more worldly aspects.²⁸ He later recalled a story from his adolescence that indicates some sense of this limited exposure. Weatherford noted that at one Sunday service the preacher's daughter fainted in the choir, adding "I well remember one of the older women in the congregation cried out loosen her corset. That shocked me for I don't think I had ever seen a corset in my life and to have it talked about in public was a little too much for me."²⁹ Overall Weatherford's experience growing up provided him with a rather narrow worldview, one that was certainly provincial and Victorian, and also tinged with racism. It would take leaving this setting for Weatherford to expand his outlook.

However, no evidence exists that Weatherford traveled outside of Texas before his later teenage years. It is safe to assume he spent most his early life in the local setting of his hometown. His family lived on the edge of Weatherford and farmed during his first years, but later his father left agriculture to become a storeowner.³⁰ Samuel Weatherford had been unsuccessful in several business ventures over the years, and as an adult Weatherford's memories showed that his childhood was stamped by a sense of poverty and lack of opportunities, recalling that his father had been "a poor man and a

²⁸ W. D. Weatherford untitled handwritten essay (12 pages), [1958–1961], p. 1, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

²⁹ See unpaginated notebook, W. D. Weatherford, "Growing Up in Weatherford, Texas," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

³⁰ See untitled genealogy notes, p. 5, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College at Vanderbilt," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

little farmer.”³¹ At best his family seemed to be middle class—but only barely—for the time, owning their own home and approximately twenty acres of farm land.³²

Weatherford’s relationship with his father appears strained. As an adult Weatherford mentioned him very few times, primarily recalling only his memories of working on the farm in his childhood and as a cashier in the merchandise store in his youth.³³ Weatherford described his father as “an exacting man,” who “never talked much” and also as a “kindly man but rigidly stern and demanding.”³⁴ Something Weatherford never articulated, but which undoubtedly impacted his life, was that his father apparently was an alcoholic and that at some point in the marriage had left the family. The exact details of this breakup are unclear because neither Weatherford nor other members of his family ever talked of this deep family secret.³⁵

³¹ See “Growing up in Weatherford Texas,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and untitled genealogy notes, p. 4–5, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

³² See untitled genealogy notes, p. 4, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. Wilma Dykeman portrays the family’s financial situation in a more positive light, insisting that “The Weatherfords might have been poor by today’s luxurious standards, but for their time and place they were solid middle-class citizens.” See Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 15. However, this is not the tone one gets from Weatherford’s recollections in “Growing up in Weatherford, Texas.” Weatherford at one point, while comparing himself with a son of a prominent family in town, says he was “a very poor boy.” Also, in his discussion of his desire for a good education, he notes “my home could not help me a cent financially.”

³³ “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

³⁴ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

³⁵ See Anne Weatherford, personal interview, September 11, 2009, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina. Anne Weatherford notes this information came through her husband’s (Willis, Jr.) first cousin Virginia. She was the daughter of Flora Weatherford (W. D.’s older sister). Perhaps the closest Weatherford gets to touching on the subject of his parents’ marital problems is when he tells a story of his mother’s bravery while she was alone taking care of her young children on the frontier. Weatherford follows this story by noting “To her dying day she had the nerve to defend both herself and her family. I owe to her and her determination my own determination to get an education. . .” According to Anne Weatherford, Margaret Weatherford had asked her husband to leave the family, and perhaps this former statement by W.D. is hinting at her f]ortitude. For quote see “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Samuel Weatherford was living alone at the time of his death even though his wife was not yet deceased. See “Death of S. L. Weatherford,” January 18, 1913, *Daily Herald*, p. 4, photocopy of newspaper clipping in Weatherford family vertical file, Weatherford Public Library, Weatherford, Texas. One other document in Weatherford Public Library files on the Weatherford family indicates Samuel Leonard was living alone at the time of his passing. See sheet with 1870, 1880, and 1900 United States Census reports for Weatherford family.

Weatherford resolved at a young age to be different from his father and to make something more of his life. Thinking back on this period in later years he remembered that at age eight

I determined I would not use tobacco—although my father and two older brothers smoked....I have never drawn a puff of pipe, cigarette, or cigar—I am and have always been a tetoller on tobacco and whiskey. At 12 I decided I would go to college. My father discouraged me, but I set my mind on getting a real education. At about 15 I determined to go into religious work.³⁶

Samuel Weatherford's problem with alcohol likely explains why W. D. became such a strong critic of drink for the rest of his life.³⁷ After Weatherford left Texas in 1897 for his studies at Vanderbilt University, he reveals only one time when he and his father met again.³⁸

Of his parents Weatherford's mother was undoubtedly the more important force, and this was particularly evident in her support of his education. Prior to his entering the fourth grade at age eight, Weatherford received no formal schooling, until that time being tutored at home by his mother.³⁹ Weatherford attended his local school until he was twelve.⁴⁰ He then sat out a year, working at his father's store.⁴¹ At age 14 he enrolled in Weatherford College, an institution founded in 1869 and connected to the Methodist

³⁶ See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

³⁷ For examples of his support of Prohibition see W. D. Weatherford to Donald Comer, November 12, 1928, folder 590, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to John F. Baggett, April 19, 1939, folder 2583, Weatherford Papers.

³⁸ See "Growing up in Weatherford, Texas," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. On this occasion Weatherford was working for the YMCA and was traveling in Texas visiting colleges. He and his father had dinner with a prominent family in town. Weatherford even missed his father's funeral in 1913. At that time he was out of the country on a YMCA trip. See "Death of S. L. Weatherford," January 18, 1913, *Daily Herald*, Weatherford family vertical file.

³⁹ See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

Episcopal Church, South, during this period.⁴² Between 200 and 400 students made up the student body in these years, and it offered programs from elementary level through all four years of college.⁴³ It was served by approximately ten faculty members, and according to one of the instructors at the time, the institution “was almost a part of the local Methodist Church,” perhaps explaining some of its strict discipline.⁴⁴ In 1894, at eighteen years of age, Weatherford graduated from Weatherford College as his class’s valedictorian, earning his B. S.⁴⁵

Two stories from his years at Weatherford College and immediately thereafter reveal something of Margaret Weatherford’s devotion to her son’s education and ambitions. The first occurred just before his junior year. One of his teachers insisted that Weatherford should consider taking Greek if he intended to enter the ministry.⁴⁶ This subject would be needed if he sought further higher education. Thus Weatherford gathered with his parents and older brothers and sisters for a family conference to discuss this issue. His father insisted he did not think it necessary for his son to take up this subject because he did not expect W. D. would “pursue [his] studies through college, certainly not through graduate study or theological training.”⁴⁷ Moreover, his father did not consider education crucial to being a good preacher, citing a recent example of a minister with less training than Weatherford already had, delivering an outstanding

⁴² See David Minor, “Weatherford College,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/kbw7.html>, accessed 2-12-2010.

⁴³ See Minor, “Weatherford College,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*; and John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), 25.

⁴⁴ See Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 25–26; and Joe B. Witherspoon, *Weatherford College: Enlightening the Frontier, 1869–1986* (Texas?: s.n., 1986), 10.

⁴⁵ See Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 31; and “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁴⁶ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 25–26.

⁴⁷ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

sermon at a Methodist conference. While Weatherford's mother sat silently listening to this discussion, his brothers and sisters tacitly agreed with their father, and it was implicitly accepted he would not take Greek. Yet, Weatherford later recalled that as everyone started to leave, his "mother nudged [his] elbow and said: 'If you want to take Greek – you take it.'"⁴⁸ Weatherford did take it, and his study of the language not only boosted his confidence in this period, but the subject also proved important for his future studies at Vanderbilt.

The other story that illustrates his mother's dedication occurred after Weatherford graduated from the local college. By this time he had taught and served as principal two years in small Texas schools and was planning to begin Vanderbilt in the fall of 1897.⁴⁹ Weatherford hoped to enter the Nashville school with junior standing because of his already completed collegiate work. However, to achieve this advanced status he would have to pass a series of examinations. Over the previous years while working as a teacher and paying off debts for his local college experience, he had continued to read widely, apparently by an oil lamp at night. As a result of these not-so-favorable reading conditions his "eyes broke down," and his doctor insisted he rest them in the summer months prior to beginning Vanderbilt.⁵⁰ These instructions exasperated Weatherford because he had hoped to study extensively in the fields of history, economics, and sociology to prepare for his entrance tests. Weatherford's mother, who was with him on this occasion, vowed to read the material to him. Weatherford insists that over the next

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Dykeman insists that Weatherford had been inflicted with typhoid in the spring of 1897 causing his vision troubles. However Weatherford makes no mention of this illness affecting him as he relates this story in his personal notebook, rather blaming the trouble on his long hours of reading with poor lighting. For Dykeman's version see *Prophet of Plenty*, 32.

months she “read thousands of pages” on these subjects, helping him to pass his oral examinations when he arrived at Vanderbilt, and thus giving him junior status.⁵¹

Weatherford’s experience at his hometown college introduced him to intellectual and religious concerns that would foreshadow later important focuses in his life. While the school was by no means outstanding—Weatherford remarking at one point that although it granted bachelor’s degrees in the arts and sciences, it “really should not have for it did not have adequate resources to give degrees”—it did provide him with the basic fundamentals of learning. Moreover, his schooling at Weatherford College prompted him to begin thinking through his religious commitments.⁵² One course that proved particularly influential was introduction to philosophy. The instructor, Fannie Whitsell, while probably not the “greatest student of philosophy” according to Weatherford, often let him and another student, Jim Wilson, debate major philosophical problems in class.⁵³ Thus in this setting Weatherford had the opportunity to defend the Christian and religious perspective, while Wilson, the “sceptic or doubter,” took the “materialistic view” of things.⁵⁴ Looking back on this experience Weatherford insisted he

was already turning in [his] thought to what [he] later learned to call ‘Personalism.’ Personalism according to Dr. Borden Browne of Boston University means that neither materialistic mechanism nor abstract forms of idealism will enable us to move forward in the explanation of our universe. Personality is the real and only principle of philosophy which will enable us to take any rational steps whatever. . . . This thought has made concrete and real the meaning of religion to me, for it is the relationship between a human person and a divine person. It is not simply emotion. It has an emotional content because all personal relations have an emotional content, but it is a real and definite relationship between persons. To be a Christian is to be a friendly son of God—

⁵¹ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁵² See “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁵³ “Growing Up in Weatherford, Texas,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

and that has real content or to put it another way Christian experience is right relationship between a human personality and a divine personality and that has both reality and power in it.⁵⁵

This experience helped Weatherford slowly begin to develop a more systematic theological grounding for his faith and furthermore pushed him to try to make a rational argument for religious belief, a key theme that would continue for the rest of his life. The field of philosophy of religion would remain important for Weatherford, being for him “the queen of all the studies.”⁵⁶

Of equal importance to those courses that affected his intellectual growth at this time was Weatherford’s involvement in an extracurricular activity, the YMCA. While at Weatherford College he joined this student organization, becoming president of it by the time he was sixteen.⁵⁷ This proved to be a very important decision in his life since he would devote his career to this institution. What would have drawn him to this group? While Weatherford was Methodist, it is unlikely there was a campus ministry representing that denomination at the school. College YMCAs were common in this period, often being the only religious organization available.⁵⁸ Besides the obvious social advantages of such a group, the Y’s largely Protestant constituency and outlook, as well as its stance on purity issues, would have fit well with Weatherford’s religious background and his early vow to abstain from alcohol and tobacco. For a religious youngster like Weatherford, it was a logical fit.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁵⁸ David P. Setran, *The College “Y”: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4.

The YMCA proved very influential in helping to broaden Weatherford's worldview. Specifically it exposed him to new and more learned religious figures, provided him opportunities for travel, and pushed his ambitions. In 1893 Fletcher Brockman, the YMCA's southern student secretary, stopped at Weatherford College on one of his tours through southern institutions.⁵⁹ Weatherford, as the school's YMCA representative, met Brockman at the railroad station and escorted him on to campus. In a letter to Brockman over thirty-five years later Weatherford still remembered this visit, insisting it was "one of the high spots in [his] life."⁶⁰ After this initial encounter Brockman's impact on Weatherford continued as the two crossed paths in future years.

In 1894 Weatherford traveled as a student delegate to a national YMCA conference in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. This trip proved to be important for two reasons. First, Weatherford met someone there who would later become a friend and important co-worker in southern interracial efforts, George Washington Carver (the future Tuskegee Institute scientist). Carver at the time was a student at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts and was also a participant in the National Students' Summer School that Weatherford was attending.⁶¹ Weatherford had likely never met a black college student before this event, and he later recalled the following details regarding Carver's presence there: "I remember that he was rather popular, that he was the only Negro on the grounds and that those of us from the South at the time thought it a little queer that there

⁵⁹ See W. D. Weatherford to Fletcher S. Brockman, October 8, 1929, folder 3161, Weatherford Papers; R. H. King memorandum, October 7, 1929, folder 3161, Weatherford Papers; C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 667; and Setran, *College 'Y'*, 265.

⁶⁰ Weatherford to Brockman, October 8, 1929, folder 3161, Weatherford Papers.

⁶¹ Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford and other cities: Oxford University Press, 1981), 34.

should be a Negro delegate present.”⁶² It seems that Weatherford must have harbored some prejudice toward blacks at this time, and he hinted at this feeling in a later letter to Carver in 1932. Thinking back about their initial meeting, he wrote “You were from Iowa and I was from a small college in Texas – yes, Texas – the state of wide prairies, but narrow prejudices at the time. So you and I were as widely separated personally as were our educational institutions separated physically.”⁶³ Meeting Carver at this conference perhaps began a slow awakening process for Weatherford in terms of his racial views.

This YMCA event was also important because it put Weatherford once more in touch with Brockman. Brockman was in his mid-twenties at the time and had been working as a YMCA secretary since 1892.⁶⁴ He was also a recent graduate of Vanderbilt University. Weatherford likely identified with this man because of his age, and Brockman’s ambition and education similarly would have impressed him, making YMCA service appealing. As a result while at the conference the two discussed the possibility of Weatherford entering the YMCA secretaryship.⁶⁵ Weatherford also talked about further education, specifically the prospect of going to Vanderbilt.⁶⁶ Thus Brockman’s influence helped nudge Weatherford in two important directions that would be defining aspects of Weatherford’s life, Vanderbilt for additional studies and the YMCA as a career.

⁶² W. D. Weatherford to Lucy Cherry Crisp, January 18, 1939, folder 2601, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Lucy Cherry Crisp, January 18, 1939, box 3, folder F, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, collection number 154, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

⁶³ W. D. Weatherford to George Washington Carver, November 7, 1932, folder 3641, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁴ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 667; and Setran, *College ‘Y’*, 265.

⁶⁵ Weatherford to Brockman, October 8, 1929, folder 3161, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁶ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

Other factors likely played a role in Weatherford's decision to choose Vanderbilt. In many ways it would have been the logical decision for a southern Methodist at the time (particularly for someone interested in the ministry), it being that denomination's flagship university in the South.⁶⁷ Moreover, there was already some precedent in his family for pursuing higher education in Nashville. One of his older sisters had graduated from Peabody College in that city.⁶⁸ This would have provided him with some basic understanding of the area and possibly some contacts there to aid in the transition. Dykeman's biography of Weatherford also insists that an experience in his early teenage years played a part in his ambition to attend Vanderbilt.⁶⁹ The story goes that while Weatherford was working at his father's store, a man came to request a donation for Weatherford College. But Samuel Weatherford did not have money to offer at the time. The man with a condescending tone commented that his son did not even intend to matriculate at Weatherford College, but was going instead to the more prestigious Vanderbilt. He went on to add that Samuel Weatherford would certainly want to give to the local school to ensure its survival because W. D. probably would go there, if he went anywhere. Apparently this event affronted the young Weatherford's honor, pushing him to set his sights on the Tennessee university. Whatever the reasoning, in the fall of 1897 Weatherford made his way to Nashville to begin his education at Vanderbilt, a decision that was pivotal in affecting the future course of his life.

⁶⁷ For Vanderbilt see Paul K. Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985); and Charles A. Israel, *Before Scopes: Evangelicalism, Education, and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870–1925* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 43–67.

⁶⁸ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁶⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 23.

This move undoubtedly proved to be a major transition for the young man from west Texas. At this time Nashville's population was roughly 80,000, with African Americans making up nearly 40 percent of that total.⁷⁰ Vanderbilt had been open for just over twenty years, and it was finally beginning to develop into the high-quality institution of which its founders had dreamed.⁷¹ In 1887 the school had an endowment of over \$900,000.⁷² Prior to its creation Methodists did not have a top-notch school in league with Yale (Congregational), Brown (Baptist), or Princeton (Presbyterian), with Randolph-Macon College in Virginia being the southern church's best institution.⁷³ Thus Tennessee Methodists, with this purpose in mind, began organizing in 1858 what would take shape as Vanderbilt in the 1860s and 1870s.⁷⁴ Critical to the establishment of the school and its future success was a tremendous initial boost from Cornelius Vanderbilt, who provided a gift of roughly \$1,000,000.⁷⁵ The Commodore, while not particularly religious, had been motivated to make this bequest because of family connections to Holland N. McTyeire (Vanderbilt board president) and due to a desire to offer help to the South in the wake of the Civil War.⁷⁶ When the school opened in 1875, 115 students matriculated; and by the time Weatherford began in 1897, attendance was approximately 200.⁷⁷ Therefore despite the fact Nashville would have been a "big city" for

⁷⁰ Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880–1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 235. For more information on the city's black population see Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780–1930* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999).

⁷¹ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 19 and 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7 and 31.

⁷⁴ Israel, *Before Scopes*, 44.

⁷⁵ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 17–18. Vanderbilt gave his initial gift in 1873 but added more funds before his death in 1877 bringing his total donation to nearly a million dollars.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 and 18.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 55 and 102.

Weatherford, the size of Vanderbilt would not have been particularly imposing in terms of its student body.

Socially it would have been a different story. Vanderbilt catered to the Mid South's more well-to-do, drawing most of its students from families in business and the professional classes.⁷⁸ According to Paul Conkin, the university's historian, students who went to Vanderbilt "saw themselves as an elite, as the ablest young men of the South" who "were clearly the future leaders and shapers of a new South."⁷⁹ Yet as academic standards rose through the 1880s and 1890s, the preparation required to gain admission led to a decline in the number of Methodists attending the school, with less than 50 percent claiming this church affiliation in 1900.⁸⁰ Episcopalians and Presbyterians—denominations often associated with more affluence—came to make up a higher percentage of the students. Thus while Weatherford certainly identified with the ambitious nature of the school's students, his background and status might have made him feel socially inferior at the time. This sense of inadequacy proved significant in shaping Weatherford's early life. These experiences also likely explain why status and appearance became so important for Weatherford in future years.

Despite Vanderbilt's growing standing in the 1890s and the esteem in which its students held the university, the years during which Weatherford attended were marked

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 129. It should be noted that Vanderbilt had few women students in this period (10 in 1892). Over its early history a small number had attended the school, these usually having been the daughters of faculty or administration. However, between 1892 and 1901 "women at Vanderbilt gained full legal equality." See Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 131–132.

⁸⁰ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 129. The relationship between Vanderbilt and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South became increasingly strained after 1900. In 1914 the two broke ties. See Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 201.

by some setbacks.⁸¹ One of the chief reasons for this decline was the economic depression of the 1890s that put financial pressure on the college.⁸² The school had already extended itself in building projects, and a small yield on its endowment strained it further. These issues contributed to low faculty salaries that led many of the ablest professors to seek positions at better paying institutions.⁸³ Further adding to the decline in excellence of Vanderbilt's faculty was the death and retirement of several key professors in this period.

Amid this context Weatherford entered Vanderbilt in 1897. Because he was expecting to enter the ministry, he intended to study philosophy; but he found the department head of that discipline "quite dogmatic" and "not as up to date."⁸⁴ Therefore he shifted to the field of English literature, studying under the highly regarded William M. Baskervill, a man who Weatherford described as "one of the grandest men in the university."⁸⁵ Weatherford's transcript reveals that he did well in these courses in his two undergraduate years, posting grades in the middle to high nineties for all four semesters—his highest averages for each term being in this subject.⁸⁶ In his other classes

⁸¹ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 108.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 110–111.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 106–108. Conkin notes that chair professors' total compensation (roughly \$2300 a year) in 1894 were actually less than those of their counterparts in 1875.

⁸⁴ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Even though Weatherford never received seminary training he still went on to become an ordained minister in the Methodist church. He could perform baptisms, weddings, and funerals, but it is unclear if he could serve Communion. See Anne Weatherford, personal interview, September 11, 2009, Far Horizons.

⁸⁵ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Baskervill was one of a series of Vanderbilt's early professors who was educated at Wofford College for his undergraduate degree and then later took the Ph. D. at the University of Leipzig in Germany. He was honored for both his teaching and scholarship, publishing a book on southern writers. See Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 66–67 and Anja Becker, "Southern Academic Ambitions Meet German Scholarship: The Leipzig Networks of Vanderbilt University's James H. Kirkland in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Southern History*, 74 (November 2008): 855–886.

⁸⁶ See W. D. Weatherford academic transcript, Registrar's Office, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

Weatherford also did fairly well, with his poorest performance in his two semesters of English Philology where he received grades in the low eighties. Overall, his marks proved strong enough to win him a Phi Beta Kappa key, a source of intense pride that he wore the rest of his life.⁸⁷

Weatherford's time at Vanderbilt was also taken up by activities other than his studies. Since Weatherford did not have the financial means to pay up front for college, he had to take out loans and work during his student years to make his way. Like most undergraduates intending to enter the ministry at this point, he lived in the Biblical Department's building, Wesley Hall, for his first year.⁸⁸ Here he helped pay his room costs by being responsible for handling the gas lighting. Food cost him an additional \$10 per month, and Weatherford began accumulating debts (eventually over \$1,900 by the end of his graduate education).⁸⁹ His second year he secured an assistantship as a gym instructor and moved into a private home where he also took his meals. Weatherford also continued his YMCA involvement after entering Vanderbilt. Moving on to graduate school at the university, he became more occupied in the leadership of the school's YMCA, serving as president for two years.⁹⁰ In addition to those activities, Weatherford also joined a fraternity, Alpha Tau Omega, and became the president of the Graduate Club. To help provide for his school and living costs in these later years he served as an

⁸⁷ See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. It should be noted that he received this honor sometime after he received his B.A. in 1899. Vanderbilt was not granted this prestigious honor society until 1901. See Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 133.

⁸⁸ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 75; and "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁸⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 40.

⁹⁰ "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Vanderbilt's YMCA was organized in 1885. See Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 79.

assistant in the history department and as head instructor in physical education. In the latter position he coached Vanderbilt's first basketball team in 1900.⁹¹

Of considerable importance in broadening Weatherford's worldview in this period was the exposure to African Americans that he experienced at Vanderbilt and in and around Nashville. The sizable black population in the city would have been much greater than he had been accustomed to in Weatherford, Texas. With the existence of several institutions of higher learning for African Americans, including Fisk University, Roger Williams University, and Meharry Medical College, Weatherford might even have had some interaction with college-educated blacks.⁹² Nevertheless, Weatherford's closest interaction would likely have been with the staff at Vanderbilt (almost entirely black), who took care of much of the arduous and less-pleasant work around the campus such as the cooking, grounds care, and servant roles.⁹³ In this period, the white students on campus generally seemed to have held a pessimistic view about the potential of African Americans, considering "social equality" virtually "impossible."⁹⁴ At best, the most progressive of the students were gradualists.

Weatherford likely came to Vanderbilt with a similar outlook, but his interaction with blacks in Nashville proved to be a crucial turning point for his views on race. In 1932 as he reminisced with George Washington Carver about their initial meeting in

⁹¹ See "Growing Up in Weatherford, Texas," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; W. D. Weatherford pledge card, RG 935, Alumni Relations, Box 2687, Folder 100, Special Collections & University Archives, Vanderbilt University Library, Nashville Tennessee; and Bill Traugher, "The History of Vanderbilt Athletics, part 1," <http://vucommodores.cstv.com/genrel/082708aaa.html>, accessed 2/23/10.

⁹² Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 144–172.

⁹³ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 83.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83. Conkin does note one important instance where Vanderbilt was the forum for more progressive views on race in this period. For the 1887 commencement ceremonies, George Washington Cable, a noted white southern liberal of the time and author of *The Silent South* (1885), spoke on racial issues.

1894 and his narrow views at that time, he went on to add, “But when I went to Vanderbilt I had the opportunity to serve a number of colored workers, so my sympathies were broadened enough and my eyes opened.”⁹⁵ In particular, Weatherford had contact with two African American men who were campus institutions. In his first year of graduate school Weatherford lived on Westside Row, a series of dorms that housed roughly sixteen students in each house.⁹⁶ Here Robert Wingfield served as the cook to these residents and was known for having a special annual Christmas dinner for a select group of his favorites, usually inviting six to eight of them.⁹⁷ In 1899 Weatherford was one of these chosen few, and in the future he remembered Wingfield as “one of the finest Negro men in the laboring class I ever knew.”⁹⁸ Not only was this invite an honor for the occasion but it also put Weatherford in touch with other blacks at the school, and as he noted, “from that time on I stood tops with all the colored help on the campus.”⁹⁹ Weatherford also got to know John E. Fulton, who lived in the basement of Wesley Hall.¹⁰⁰ Fulton had been a long-time servant of the Club IV, a group of bachelor professors at Vanderbilt that had included Chancellor James H. Kirkland, William Dudley, John T. McGill, William T. Macgruder, and Austin H. Merrill.¹⁰¹ Fulton became rather famous around campus for posting the pictures of former Vanderbilt students on the walls of his room and for his reading of Joel Chandler Harris’s Uncle Remus tales,

⁹⁵ Weatherford to Carver, November 7, 1932, folder 3641, Weatherford Papers.

⁹⁶ “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 76.

⁹⁷ “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 305.

⁹⁸ “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 305.

¹⁰¹ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 103 and 305.

gaining Fulton the nickname “Uncle Remus.”¹⁰² Weatherford later recalled that Fulton “became a friend” of his and that the latter invited him to his room “often to meet people so I came to know many who were sympathetic toward the Negro.”¹⁰³ Weatherford considered it “almost providential” that he had such “favorable contact with quite a company of Negro people,” and he credited these experiences with contributing to his preparation for his “work on behalf of the Negro of the South.”¹⁰⁴ In short, Weatherford’s personal relationship with these men and other African Americans around the campus made him aware of the humanity of blacks and the inequality of existing conditions.

Weatherford’s growing concern with the plight of this minority group was also prodded along by his intellectual development. As he excelled under Baskervill in the English department, he was also exposed to this professor’s more “cosmopolitan” worldview and broader outlook on race.¹⁰⁵ Weatherford chose to remain at Vanderbilt for his graduate work, pursuing the field of English literature for his master’s and doctorate.¹⁰⁶ Weatherford followed this path because of his success in this field already and his belief that a Ph. D. would give him a “broader education” than a theological degree.¹⁰⁷ Also since he was considering YMCA work as a possible career, he believed the Ph. D. would give him more credibility and a wider audience than seminary training would. In the end, this study of literature still allowed him to pursue many of the theological questions weighing on his mind.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 305–306.

¹⁰³ “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 67.

¹⁰⁶ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹⁰⁷ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 38.

Also highly influential in Weatherford's decision to follow this route was the presence of a new English professor, Richard Jones, who replaced Baskervill after the latter's death in 1899.¹⁰⁸ Jones, born in 1855 in Berlin, Wisconsin, was the son of a minister.¹⁰⁹ He had attended Grinnell College and studied at Oxford and Munich before receiving his doctorate from Heidelberg in 1893.¹¹⁰ Jones specialized in the literature of Alfred Tennyson and John Ruskin, and by the time Weatherford took him, Jones was in his mid-forties, still a relatively young professor. As Weatherford made plans for the beginning of his master's work, he was attracted to this new teacher who had a "keen social conscience" and who was planning to offer a course on "Philosophical Aspects and Ideals of Literature" with particular attention to the works of Robert Browning, John Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Dante.¹¹¹ Just as Weatherford desired, this course would allow him to grapple with fundamental issues and concerns in religion and philosophy, matters in which Weatherford was vitally interested. Jones's mentorship and the overall experience of graduate school proved to be very significant in Weatherford's life. Weatherford later described Jones as "thoroughly alive and passionately interested in people," adding, "I owe him a great debt of gratitude for what interest I have had in human welfare."¹¹² On this advanced training as a whole, Weatherford, looking back on this experience over sixty years later, crediting this education as passing to him three "great" gifts: "a passionate love for great literature," "a sense of social mission in the

¹⁰⁸ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ "Dr. Richard Jones Dies in Canada," *The Vanderbilt Alumnus*, October, 1923, Vol. IX, No. 1, Special Collections & University Archives, Vanderbilt University Library, Nashville Tennessee

¹¹⁰ See "Dr. Richard Jones Dies in Canada," Special Collection & University Archives, Vanderbilt; and Herbert Z. Kip, "Tribute to Dr. Richard Jones," *The Vanderbilt Alumnus*, January, 1924, Vol. IX, No. 3, Special Collection & University Archives, Vanderbilt University Library.

¹¹¹ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

world,” and “a method of study which has dominated my life.”¹¹³ Graduate school, in short, solidified Weatherford’s already basic love of learning while helping him to direct his knowledge toward social improvement.

Over these years of study Weatherford gained an appreciation for a relatively wide range of literature. He developed a great respect for British and American writers, but he also came to admire classical authors as well. In poetry, Weatherford considered Browning’s “The Ring and the Book,” Tennyson’s “In Memoriam,” and Dante’s “Divine Comedy” the great poems he had read, with Dante’s “perhaps” being the “greatest of the three.”¹¹⁴ His favorite poet was a southerner from Georgia, Sidney Lanier, attracting Weatherford so much that Lanier’s volume of poems was the only one that Weatherford “committed to memory” in his student days at Vanderbilt.¹¹⁵ Weatherford also admired the work of Rabindranath Tagore and Carlyle, particularly the latter’s *Sartor Resartus*.¹¹⁶ Moreover Weatherford respected the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne and George Eliot, completing his master’s thesis comparing their philosophies of life, and considering that the latter “wrote the greatest novels” he had ever read.¹¹⁷ His high esteem for Eliot is somewhat surprising in that he would have found several aspects of her personal life objectionable, particularly that she espoused a non-theistic philosophy and lived with a married man for many years. Perhaps his admission reveals that Weatherford’s personality was less rigid than it often seemed to indicate, and that he could separate the art from the artist. As far as biblical literature is concerned, Weatherford never made

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Tagore was a Bengali writer whose published works brought him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.

¹¹⁷ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Weatherford untitled handwritten essay, p. 5, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. An analysis of Weatherford’s master’s thesis is not possible because no copies exist.

mention of New Testament works that he revered, but he did record that Job, Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea ranked as his favorites from the Old Testament.¹¹⁸ With the exception of Job—which probably appealed to Weatherford because it focused on reconciling the existence of evil in a world with a loving God—all of these books were prophetic texts. Weatherford maintained his interest in literature in future years, but other concerns left little opportunity for returning to these great works. Near the end of his life, in one of the more moving revelations Weatherford ever made, he commented “If I were not so overwhelmed with social problems, such as race, the Appalachian problems, poverty, ignorance and evil, poetry would be my great passion—but I find little time to go back to Browning, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Dante or Lanier. I do occasionally go back to Tagore—when the pressure gets too great. (Forgive me for revealing quite so much of my heart).”¹¹⁹ While poetry and literature nurtured some of Weatherford’s deepest needs, the life of the mind would always remain secondary to pragmatic action for him.

Weatherford completed his master’s and doctoral work (1900, 1907) under the program Vanderbilt had developed in the 1890s.¹²⁰ It was the beginning of a modern system that included specialized graduate-level seminars and a more directed course of study, a trend drawing upon the German educational model already underway in advanced institutions around the United States.¹²¹ Yet the rigor of Vanderbilt’s program undoubtedly would still not have matched top-notch ones like those at Johns Hopkins

¹¹⁸ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. His favorite passage of scripture, which he considered “one of the greatest chapters in all of literature,” was Isaiah 53, verse 5. This chapter deals with the “Suffering Servant” and reads: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made up whole; and by his bruises we are healed.” (*Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*). These lines hint at the future death of Jesus and the substitutionary atonement doctrine.

¹¹⁹ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹²⁰ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 290.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

University and the University of Chicago.¹²² For the M.A. Weatherford had to complete six hours of graduate coursework, take a five-hour exam, and write a thesis; and for the Ph.D. he needed to prepare and take exams for three fields of study, produce a “typed or published dissertation,” and pass a final exam.¹²³ Weatherford quickly finished his M.A. by 1900, writing a thesis comparing the philosophies of life of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Puritanism) and George Eliot (Positivism).¹²⁴ While this document does not survive, other records reveal that this project was essentially an extension of Weatherford’s interest in wrestling with the existence of God. In the process of reading Eliot’s works, Weatherford came to study Auguste Comte’s positivism, the philosophy underlying Eliot’s approach. This system denied the existence of a personal God and declared humanity to be the “ultimate reality.”¹²⁵ While it is unclear what Weatherford’s precise thoughts on Hawthorne’s beliefs were, it was apparent that Comte’s approach did not appease him, as he noted “I am bold to say this school of thought carried little conviction with me.”¹²⁶ For Weatherford, secular humanism in no way squared with his understanding of the world.

Weatherford’s undergraduate and graduate school years, however, did prompt a questioning of his Christian faith. In the midst of his master’s work in 1900 he experienced a deep period of doubt that would extend throughout the rest of his coursework.¹²⁷ Weatherford later recalled that in this time “the spirits of E. B. Taylor and

¹²² Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 22.

¹²³ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 89.

¹²⁴ Weatherford academic transcript, Vanderbilt University; and Weatherford untitled handwritten essay, p. 5, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁵ Weatherford untitled handwritten essay, p. 5, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Herbert Spencer—the earliest sociologists were walking the American campus and troubling the souls of youth.”¹²⁸ Weatherford’s exposure to new knowledge had made him uncertain of the foundation of his beliefs. By this point in his studies Weatherford had already had a basic introduction to the sciences through undergraduate courses in chemistry, physics, botany, and biology, and as he began his advanced work in literature, he also was taking a course on geology. While he would later be unable to recall any particular aspect of that discipline that created doubt in him, he insisted

the whole general atmosphere of inquiry so characteristic of the time and of the university forced me to ask whether there was any reality in this experience we called religion, or, whether it might just be something put over on me from the past, simply a superstition handed down through my parents, or through the church.¹²⁹

Within this context, Weatherford began a searching process probing the meaning of religion. Weatherford notes he received guidance in this quest from “an English professor” (presumably Richard Jones), who helped him to “raise all the questions” and encouraged him “never to rest until [he] had answered some of them at least tentatively.”¹³⁰ This teacher also introduced his student to classic works of literature that showed how others had struggled with these great questions, having him study the book of Job, Dante’s “Divine Comedy,” Milton’s “Paradise Lost,” Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, Tennyson’s “In Memoriam,” and Browning’s “Le Saisiaz.” Weatherford’s problem was one that many serious-minded believers were likely to face if they wanted to reconcile their knowledge of the world with their faith.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

As Weatherford wrestled with various explanations for the origin of religion, he repeatedly came back to one particular point: why were people “drawn to worship”?¹³¹ Weatherford believed that there was a profound need within all people for something greater than themselves and that their souls longed for “fellowship” with this entity.¹³² Working from this basic idea, he regarded humanistic philosophies as inadequate because they could not account for this deep need. Weatherford wrote: “If there was no superhuman but only humans, why should man be drawn to worship at all?”¹³³ Weatherford also gained crucial guidance in his quest while studying Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” during his second year of graduate school. In this text the writer struggled with the death of a close friend, and Weatherford connected with this piece because it seemed to consider for him all the concerns “that were troubling [his] soul” at the time.¹³⁴ In the end, Weatherford settled his religious crisis of faith through a version of the ontological argument for God, which asserts that because there is an idea of infinite being within us, then there must be some reality corresponding to it.¹³⁵ As he contemplated Tennyson’s poem, he came to the following conclusion:

If in one’s deepest nature there is a great need, then there must be some provision for meeting that need—else this world is not a rational world. Hence this longing for fellowship with a power like ourselves but infinitely beyond ourselves, could mean nothing except that such a power did exist. So argued Tennyson, and his reasoning met a deep response in my troubled soul.¹³⁶

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³⁵ W. D. Weatherford, *Fundamental Religious Principles in Browning’s Poetry* (Nashville and Dallas: Smith and Lamar Agents, Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1907), 21.

¹³⁶ Weatherford untitled handwritten essay, p. 8, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford also made a similar argument on this same page of his essay noting “Tennyson came to feel that it would be a cheat world which put into the soul of a man such deep longings for fuller life, and then made no provision for satisfying those longings.”

Weatherford went further to conclude that religion was basically about a relationship, specifically “the response of the soul of man to the soul of God.”¹³⁷ Weatherford’s line of reasoning reveals two basic assumptions he held. One, all people have a longing for something greater than themselves, and two, the world should make sense. Like most people of this era, he worked from a beginning position that there was meaning and purpose in life. Weatherford was unable to entertain the notion of the alternative, and thus he settled his faith predicament working from this premise.

Weatherford went on to confront other timeless religious questions in his doctoral work and while writing his dissertation. He finished the coursework for this degree by 1902, but it took him until 1907 to complete the written document and finally earn his Ph.D.¹³⁸ Weatherford chose to focus on Robert Browning for his dissertation, exploring the author’s underlying religious beliefs through a close reading of his poetry. Like Weatherford’s master’s thesis, his dissertation no longer exists but it can be assumed that his first book, *Fundamental Religious Principles in Browning’s Poetry* (1907), is virtually the same as his dissertation.¹³⁹ Weatherford must have passed along to the Methodist publishing house in Nashville the completed document soon after he finished the requirements for the degree. The book lists “W. D. Weatherford, Ph. D.” on the title

¹³⁷ Weatherford untitled handwritten essay, p. 10, folder 3720, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁸ For his graduation dates see W. D. Weatherford’s 1929 application for Who’s Who in American Education, folder 923, Weatherford Papers. There has been some confusion as to when Weatherford received his Ph. D. due mostly to Dykeman’s assertion that “At the end of two undergraduate and three graduate years, Weatherford had won his three degrees at Vanderbilt” implying that in 1902 he had completed his doctorate. See Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 40. Dykeman almost certainly got this information from Weatherford’s own written recollections where he noted “When I finished 2 undergraduate and three graduate years at Vanderbilt I had gotten BA, MA, and Ph. D. degrees.” See “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Weatherford must have been confused in his older age or simply referring to finishing his coursework in 1902. The reason it took Weatherford so long to complete his dissertation is probably because he was working for the YMCA from 1902 forward, and he likely pushed to finish the project in 1907 because his first wife was expecting a child in that year.

¹³⁹ Weatherford, *Fundamental Religious Principles*.

page, and the introduction by Gross Alexander—formerly a professor in Vanderbilt’s Biblical department—was written in May 1907.¹⁴⁰ Since Weatherford was granted the Ph. D. in that year—even if it was a January conferral—it is likely few changes were made before publication. In short, it is safe to presume the dissertation and book varied little, if at all.

The book was not exactly the epitome of rigorous scholarship. Weatherford basically read through Browning’s poetry, pulling together his interpretation of the author’s thoughts about God, Christ, and the meaning of evil/suffering in the world, with little other research. The outcome of his study runs just over 150 pages (typeset in rather large font) with only 51 footnotes. Yet more disquieting than the length or level of research is that Weatherford’s analytical skill is at times lacking. For example, as he makes his argument for how he will determine Browning’s religious views from his poetry, Weatherford notes that “passages glowing with fervor may be considered as representing the poet.”¹⁴¹ This is not a very precise method, particularly for the reader who is unfamiliar with Browning. How one is to determine which parts “glow with fervor” is never made clear, and Weatherford provides no examples that illustrate such passages. At another point in the book Weatherford asserts that “real poetry”—which he describes as “verse which glows with passion”—is the “expression of the truth of a writer’s soul.”¹⁴² Again, Weatherford does not present instances where Browning’s words “glow.” Weatherford goes on to assert that his ability to understand if a section is written “sympathetically” by Browning comes from “a sense which must be acquired by

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, [6]; and Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 187.

¹⁴¹ Weatherford, *Fundamental Religious Principles*, 11.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 89.

much reading and a deep love of Browning's poetry."¹⁴³ Weatherford's contention may well be true, but this is hardly the way to make an argument in a scholarly work. Overall, while Weatherford certainly seems to have studied the Browning's work closely, he does not do an effective job of illustrating his points, relying too much on the reader simply accepting his opinions because of his supposed expertise.¹⁴⁴

Weatherford's style of writing leads one to suspect that his own religious beliefs were roughly the same as those he attributed to Browning. Weatherford's basic argument was that Browning believed in a personal and loving God, and despite the existence of evil and suffering in this world, life had purpose.¹⁴⁵ Since Weatherford made the point that Browning did not believe in a literal manifestation of evil (the devil), nor in eternal punishment (hell), it was necessary for Weatherford to explain why there was pain and suffering in the world and what its purpose was.¹⁴⁶ Weatherford insisted that Browning worked from the assumption that humanity was "in a state of progress," moving slowly closer toward perfection.¹⁴⁷ Within this framework the presence of evil was apparently necessary to life because it helped direct humankind toward this goal. Specifically its purpose was to "teach knowledge of good by contrast; to arouse the feeling of sympathy; and to serve as a means of development."¹⁴⁸ In the end, Weatherford acknowledged

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Perhaps some of the blame for the lack of scholarly rigor found in Weatherford's dissertation must be shared by the professors who guided Weatherford's studies and the caliber of work they expected under the structure of the Vanderbilt graduate program at the time. While this curriculum represented an improvement over the one that existed prior to 1890, it still must have been lacking in many respects. Conkin notes that the number of Vanderbilt graduate students declined in the 1910s and that by 1920 the program had ceased. In 1927 Vanderbilt reorganized the graduate college into what would become "its modern graduate program" that continues in existence. Exactly how this new program of 1927 improved over the former is not specified. See Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 290–291.

¹⁴⁵ Weatherford, *Fundamental Religious Principles*, 17 and 150.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89–90.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

“God is entirely responsible for the possibility of moral evil.”¹⁴⁹ Weatherford’s understanding of this phenomenon reveals an interpretation highly abstract in nature and seemingly divorced from personal experience.

A close reading of Weatherford’s dissertation also shows the growing influence that the philosophical school of Personalism had on him at this time.¹⁵⁰ As noted earlier, Weatherford was beginning to move toward an acceptance of this way of thinking even in his junior college days, despite the fact that he would not have applied this term.¹⁵¹ Personalism holds that personality is the “irreducible, ultimate reality.”¹⁵² The father of this philosophy, Borden Parker Bowne, defined personality as “selfhood, self-consciousness, self-control, and the power to know.”¹⁵³ The central starting point of this philosophy is that God is personal and is the “first cause” (First Mover) of all existence; therefore, all life and matter is to be considered as “the ongoing of the conscious activity of God.”¹⁵⁴ For example, a rock—which may be thought to be only a physical object and thus, impersonal—is actually the “experience or activity of personality” in the sense that God created it.¹⁵⁵ Personalism is a form of idealistic philosophy and stands in opposition to materialism, which asserts that only matter truly exists. Materialism would explain the existence of personality as simply the interaction of various physical elements,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵⁰ Ralph Luker also recognizes this point. See Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885–1912* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 188.

¹⁵¹ In actuality the term “Personalism” was not used to describe this philosophical system until 1905 when Borden Parker Bowne gave it this label. Before this time, while the essential ideas were there, he had referred to it as “objective idealism.” See Francis John McConnell, *Borden Parker Bowne: His Life and His Philosophy* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), 18 and 131.

¹⁵² Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Is God a Person?* (New York: Association Press, 1932), 4.

¹⁵³ Borden Parker Bowne, *Personalism* (Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1936 [1908]), 266.

¹⁵⁴ Brightman, *Is God a Person?*, 5; and Bowne, *Personalism*, v.

¹⁵⁵ Brightman, *Is God a Person?*, 4.

specifically atoms and molecules, working together to produce the mind. Yet Personalism insists that matter exists only in so far as one's personality interprets it through his senses. Personality organizes and gives meaning to the material world, and the ultimate person (in the form of God) is responsible for all reality.

While some of the idealistic elements in Personalism had existed throughout the history of philosophy, the particular strand Weatherford connected with was that which flourished at Boston University beginning in the late 1800s as Bowne led that institution's department.¹⁵⁶ Bowne's efforts were against the prevailing trends in his discipline and among intellectuals. This was an age when religious belief (specifically Christianity) had been seriously undermined by science (particularly by new knowledge in geology and biology) and through higher criticism of the Bible. Biblical miracles became harder and harder for the highly educated to accept. Charles Darwin's theories, beginning with *On the Origin of Species* (1859), further challenged belief in the supernatural, as his ideas disputed the existence of a purposeful world with a God active in life and human affairs. Intellectuals now increasingly questioned whether humanity held a special and unique place in the world and whether life had purpose. For these thinkers, as Bowne put this viewpoint, "The truth about man had been found out, and the truth was that instead of being a child of the Highest he is merely the highest of the animals, having essentially the same history and destiny as they, —birth, hunger, labor, weariness, and death. Man was viewed as simply an incident in the condensation of dispersed matter, or the cooling of a fiery gas."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Bowne, *Personalism*, vii.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

Bowne, of course, disagreed with this assessment, and he labored to provide a basis for theistic belief (specifically Christianity) while still accepting advancements made in science. Through Personalism he tried to reinstate the uniqueness of humankind, emphasizing that self-consciousness not only made humans special among all animals but also connected them to God. Moreover, personality gives meaning to the material world, as Bowne insists “The world of space objects which we call nature is no substantial existence by itself, and still less a self-running system apart from intelligence, but only the flowing expression and means of communication of those personal beings.”¹⁵⁸ In essence he came to assert that while science can explain the physical aspects of the world by reducing everything down to the interplay of atoms, there is still much left to account for and Personalism alone provides the explanation. For Bowne and his followers, the intangible was the real. Matter, the visible, was actually an extension of the ultimate personality (God). Humans and God both share consciousness yet the complete form is found only in God. Bowne’s ideas helped Weatherford to reconcile his faith with the new knowledge he had acquired in his Vanderbilt years. In the future Weatherford would go on to laud Bowne’s *Personalism* (1908) as the “greatest piece of philosophical writing that America has produced,” synthesizing the philosopher’s argument down to one sentence: “A world of persons with a supreme person as the head is the conception to which we came as the result of our critical reflection.”¹⁵⁹ For Weatherford this became “the summation of [his] philosophy of religious life.”¹⁶⁰ After Bowne’s death in 1910, subsequent Boston University philosophers A. C. Knudson and Edgar Sheffield

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁵⁹ W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, “Need for study of religion etc. in Appalachia,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina; and Bowne, *Personalism*, 277–278.

¹⁶⁰ Weatherford, “Need for study of religion, etc. in Appalachia,” Weatherford family papers.

Brightman would take up Bowne's mantle, and in later years Weatherford developed a close connection to Brightman.

Within Weatherford's dissertation there are several points that reveal the influence of Personalism. First, as Gross Alexander points out in the book's foreword, the "result" of Weatherford's "interpretation" of Browning "is a fresh and breathing statement of the reality and personality of God."¹⁶¹ Furthermore, at several places in the text Weatherford drives home the point that Browning believed in a personal God.¹⁶² Weatherford also illustrates another aspect of this philosophy in his study, showing how consciousness gives meaning to the world. He writes "Nature without a thinking mind to interpret it is nothing. It is dead and useless. It is as music where no ear listens, or beauty where no eye sees. But when man steps upon the stage, every process of nature takes on a new significance."¹⁶³ Finally, in a footnote where Weatherford discloses his acceptance of the ontological argument for God, there is a further comment that attests to Personalism's bearing upon his study. In this extended annotation Weatherford notes, "Then, if we mean that all conscious life is dependent on a universal self-consciousness, we arrive at a proof which is not easily refuted."¹⁶⁴ Here he is referring to the relationship between human personality and the personality of God. Overall, for Weatherford, Personalism was the guiding framework for understanding Browning. Absent from Weatherford's study, however, is how one makes the move from the belief in a personal God to proving this is the God of Christianity.

¹⁶¹ Weatherford, *Fundamental Religious Principles*, [6].

¹⁶² See *Ibid.*, 36, 39, and 152.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

Fundamental Religious Principles in Browning's Poetry is typical of Weatherford's future books. Rather than being works of rigorous scholarship, these volumes were written with a key purpose in mind that pushed forth an argument. They were not simply about adding another brick of information to a wall of knowledge. In the case of his study of Browning, Weatherford is essentially asserting his belief in the validity of Personalism as a philosophy of life. In his later books on race relations, he often wrote them not so much with a highly analytical style but rather with the intention of providing information that would change and hopefully improve current conditions for African Americans. While possessing an interest in ideas and research, Weatherford was not a professional scholar. His books were always works of advocacy of one sort or the other, not disinterested inquiry.

Weatherford's acceptance of Personalism was almost certainly due to his time at Vanderbilt where he undoubtedly came under the influence of this school of thought. Wilbur F. Tillett, professor of theology and dean of the Biblical Department during Weatherford's years at the school, was a promoter of this philosophy.¹⁶⁵ Since Weatherford first began his studies in this field, it is likely he encountered these ideas through Tillett. Moreover, Personalism was a philosophy that would have appealed to intellectuals at the time still trying to maintain faith in the Divine; thus, it likely had numerous followers at a Methodist school like Vanderbilt where religion still remained important. For Weatherford it would have been a logical fit as he tried to preserve his religious beliefs in the face of the increasing knowledge to which he was being exposed.

¹⁶⁵ Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 71; and Brightman, *Is God a Person?*, 18. Tillett wrote a sympathetic review of Brightman's book. See Wilbur F. Tillett, "The Personality of God," undated, folder 1529b, Weatherford Papers.

Weatherford's adherence to Personalism also contributed to his future involvement in race relations. Specifically it provided him with an intellectual basis for asserting that all persons have value.¹⁶⁶ Since all people—regardless of their race, class, or sex—have “personality” and the ability to commune with the ultimate person (God), then clearly they are important and have worth. Weatherford went on to merge this idea with the long-held biblical assertion that all people were made in the image of God, thus giving further weight to his conviction.¹⁶⁷ From this foundation, together with Weatherford's personal experiences with African Americans and the intellectual prodding by his Vanderbilt professors on social questions, Weatherford came to recognize that blacks deserved respect and fair treatment. Moreover, something had to be done about this group's current conditions in the South. As a result Weatherford began cautiously to move into a more public concern for race relations in the early 1900s. Yet at this time, Weatherford would only go so far, being unwilling to use political measures to confront Jim Crow. It was a stance he would share with almost all other white southern liberals of the time.

Just as Weatherford's racial views moved leftward over the course of this period, so also did his religious views, making the label “liberal Christian” an appropriate description for him in the context of the early twentieth century. In historian Paul Conkin's perceptive history of the secularization of American intellectuals, he argues this

¹⁶⁶ The epitaph on Weatherford's gravestone (which he wrote himself) speaks to his regard for persons. It reads: “WILLIS DUKE WEATHERFORD 1875–1970. FOUNDER, BUILDER AND PRESIDENT OF BLUE RIDGE, 1906–1944, MAN OF GOD AND SERVANT OF MEN, LIFE LONG STUDENT, LOVER OF YOUTH AND FRIEND OF ALL RACES. MAN OF SOCIAL PASSION AND FAITH IN GOD WHO TAUGHT THE SACREDNESS OF PERSONS AND THE DIGNITY OF LABOR.” Capitalized on tombstone. See Weatherford gravestone, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

¹⁶⁷ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

term applied to “those Christians who rejected narrow interpretations of creeds or doctrinal statements, were generous and inclusive in setting standards of membership, and, most important, were open and responsive to the need for rethinking or reformulating doctrines in the light of new biblical and scientific knowledge.”¹⁶⁸ Another marker circulating in this period, sometimes assumed proudly by those who claimed it and at other times leveled by more conservative Christians as an epithet, was “modernist.” In actuality the term represented a subset of liberals, a smaller and more radical faction of this broader category. In Conkin’s delineation of these concepts, what distinguished the modernist was that rather than “struggling to accommodate new knowledge” as the liberal did, the modernist “avidly greeted it.”¹⁶⁹ Working from these definitions, the term liberal is more suitable for Weatherford because he begrudgingly worked to adjust his Christian beliefs to fit with modern understanding. Certainly this is true if one compares Weatherford to an exemplar of modernism in this period, the University of Chicago Divinity professor Shailer Mathews.¹⁷⁰ For example, whereas Mathews would have found biblical miracles unbelievable at this time, Weatherford maintained a view that they were still possible.¹⁷¹

Weatherford’s identification with liberal Christianity was also evident in several of his other views. On the subject of evolution, he basically supported the theory, noting in one of his later books that “Humanity sprang from a common anthropoid stock.”¹⁷² In

¹⁶⁸ Paul K. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals* (Lanham and other cities: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 54.

¹⁶⁹ Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled*, 55.

¹⁷⁰ For more information on Mathews and the differences between liberal and modernist Christians see Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled*, 111–139.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁷² W. D. Weatherford, *The Negro from Africa to America* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1924), 28–29. See also Morgan Carter to W. D. Weatherford, October 28, 1927, folder 3622, Weatherford

regard to matters of religious doctrine, while remaining somewhat orthodox and generally accepting the importance of the crucifixion and “possibility” of miracles, there were some looseness in his beliefs that more conservative religious figures would have found unsettling at this time.¹⁷³ Weatherford was no biblical literalist; and even when he proclaimed his faith in certain tenets, he did not declare them with the certainty some of his fellow Christians would have liked. For example on an occasion when Weatherford was trying to defend his belief that Jesus was born of a virgin mother, his support proved less than solid. Weatherford wrote his colleague, “I do not believe there is enough biblical material to prove the Virgin birth but certainly nobody is in position to deny it. I have personally said in my own class that I did not think it affected the case one way or another, because we had Jesus regardless of how he came, and that is the important matter for Christian experience.”¹⁷⁴ This was not a strong endorsement, and Weatherford’s effort to shift the question to how this event was “important” for Christianity would have been a tendency among liberals of the time. In this same correspondence Weatherford moved on to discuss the crucifixion of Jesus, noting he believed it “was the most profound event in the history of civilization.”¹⁷⁵ However, Weatherford steers clear of commenting on the resurrection and whether or not this event actually occurred. Liberal Christians increasingly found it difficult to maintain a belief in a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus in this period.

Papers; and W. D. Weatherford, *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (New York and London: Association Press, 1912), 13.

¹⁷³ W. D. Weatherford to L. B. Hindman, June 20, 1928, folder 753, Weatherford Papers. .

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

One final view that Weatherford held, on the issue of premillennialism, placed him in the liberal camp.¹⁷⁶ Based on a literal reading of sections of the New Testament, it was assumed by many that Jesus would return to earth to rule for a thousand years. This doctrine, held by conservative evangelical Christians, tended to lead to a pessimistic view of the possibility of change in this world. In this line of thought, Jesus would come back and set things right, and there was little humans could do before that time. Weatherford did not ascribe to this interpretation, noting on one occasion “it seems to me that there is a false emphasis in the pre-millenarian doctrine.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, considering Weatherford’s openness toward modern knowledge and his flexibility in reading the Bible, he certainly qualified as a liberal Christian.¹⁷⁸ Despite his moderation in comparison to a figure like Mathews, his stances would nevertheless have been unsettling for the vast majority of southern Protestants.

Even as Weatherford was developing into a racial and religious liberal for his time, he continued to maintain many of the Victorian notions dominant in southern culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was not unusual for men and women of the South similar in education and status to Weatherford. Certainly his involvement in the YMCA, an organization that was Victorian in nature—emphasizing purity issues, self-control, respectability, and faith—contributed heavily to this attitude. Moreover, Weatherford also aspired to a life of culture, refinement, and status—all elements that matched well with Victorianism. Weatherford demonstrated these

¹⁷⁶ For a helpful discussion of premillennialism see Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled*, 60–63.

¹⁷⁷ W. D. Weatherford to R. H. King, February 24, 1930, folder 3186, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷⁸ Weatherford identification with Personalism would also have placed him among liberals because followers of this philosophy were trying to accept and incorporate the new knowledge claims made by science with their faith, yet not allow these advancements to explain away God and God’s importance in the world.

ambitions in his formal dress and conduct, and throughout the rest of his life he held to such standards.¹⁷⁹

While not a perfect fit, Weatherford's life does match closely with Daniel Singal's characterization of a southern "post-Victorian" at this time.¹⁸⁰ Like Singal's examples of the historians Ulrich B. Phillips and Broadus Mitchell and novelist Ellen Glasgow, Weatherford grew up in the late nineteenth century, and as he came of age he tried to "view the region's problems in the cold light of modern science."¹⁸¹ Perhaps he did not share the same degree of intellectual rigor these others held the South to, but it is clear that he, like them, could not "shake off the nineteenth century values [he] had been raised on" and escape his southern past and romantic image of the Old South.¹⁸²

Throughout Weatherford's writings from the early 1900s onward he expressed a deep pride in being a "southern man" and often noted he was "born and educated in the South."¹⁸³ In the early 1930s he was still extolling the virtues of the Old South when he wrote the following lines for an article regarding the Natchez, Mississippi, Garden Club:

The old South is rapidly passing. The glory and culture of that era is in great danger of being lost to the new generations. If it is lost, the future will be much impoverished. One does not need to lose sight of the shortcomings of a past age to be able to appreciate it. The old South had weaknesses of course, but it also had values that few of the present generation really understand.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Toward the end of his life he commented, "I may as well say it: My belief is that duty fulfilled brings more real joy than any seeking of passing pleasure ever brings. Perhaps that is a Spartan view but I still hold its true." See "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers.

¹⁸⁰ Singal, *War Within*, 36.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ In Weatherford's preface to his 1910 book, *Negro Life in the South* he writes "It may be worth while to say that the author is a Southern man, a graduate of Vanderbilt University, and since leaving college, has been the Student Secretary of the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations of the South" (vi).

¹⁸⁴ W. D. Weatherford, "A Significant Move," [1932], folder 1503, Weatherford Papers.

Despite the similarities with Singal's selected group of "post-Victorians," Weatherford was never an intellectual on par with them. For him, Victorian, and to an even greater extent, Christian values always held priority over the life of the mind.

Interestingly, Weatherford's respect for the South does not seem to have grown out of his Texas childhood and youth. He was not from an Old South family. Indeed, his father was no Confederate, and Weatherford, Texas, was certainly not an old southern town. Ironically, Weatherford's southern identity was formed to a greater extent by his time outside of his hometown, the same experiences that had also pushed him in a more progressive direction on race and religion. Think back to his 1894 trip to Wisconsin for the national YMCA conference. There he met George Washington Carver, an event that probably brought him his first contact with a college-educated black man. While this encounter helped to open his eyes to the potential of African Americans, the fact that Weatherford was outside the South and among people from all across the country also made him define himself as southern.

Weatherford's time at Vanderbilt and around Nashville also had an impact on his connection to the South. In his years at the university he interacted and associated with upper-class southern students and professors. Many of them would have had families tied to the Old South. Growing out of Weatherford's modest background, he probably envied some of those more affluent students who had had greater opportunities and advantages than he. In the process he would have had more exposure to this region's past culture than he had in Weatherford, likely developing some respect for it. His professors, particularly Baskervill—Weatherford's undergraduate English advisor—also would have contributed to Weatherford's respect for the South. This teacher specialized in southern

literature and had published a study of these writers, including one book on Weatherford's favorite poet, Sidney Lanier.¹⁸⁵ Thus, Weatherford's contact with these authors' works may have also inspired a longing for this bygone era.

One more connection to Nashville almost certainly influenced Weatherford's nostalgia for the Old South, his first marriage. On December 1, 1903, (his 28th birthday) Weatherford wed Lula Belle Trawick.¹⁸⁶ She was a native of Nashville, a college graduate, and her father, Andrew Marcus Trawick, was a medical doctor.¹⁸⁷ Dr. Trawick—while not from an aristocratic southern family—had served in the Confederacy and later developed a successful medical practice in Nashville, a city he had moved to in 1889 to provide better educational opportunities for his children.¹⁸⁸ Considering Weatherford's own family history, this was a marriage up in status. As he worked to fit into this new lifestyle, he would have encountered more of an awareness of southern high culture, of which an appreciation for some of the Old South's refinements would have been a part. Weatherford's daughter-in-law, Anne Weatherford, later recalled a story that provides some sense of how his relationship with the Trawick family affected Weatherford. She notes that Weatherford at some time, presumably early in his relationship with Lula Belle, visited the Trawick home for dinner.¹⁸⁹ Apparently

¹⁸⁵ See William Malone Baskervill, *Southern Writers, Biographical and Critical Studies: Sidney Lanier* (Nashville: Barbee & Smith, Agents, 1896). As a symbol of his esteem for Lanier, Weatherford later hung a life size painting of the poet in his home. See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹⁸⁶ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 52.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁸⁸ See Ada Trawick Culbreth, "Father," p. [4], Culbreth family papers, Waynesville, North Carolina; and "Death Follows Brief Illness, Dr. A. M. Trawick, One of Nashville's Most Honored Citizens Dead," Nashville *Banner* newspaper clip, May 9, 1911, in Culbreth family papers. Ada—who wrote this informal history of her father—was the oldest sister of Lula Belle and later married James Marvin Culbreth. Documents from the Culbreth family are held at the Waynesville, NC home of Elizabeth Culbreth, the granddaughter of James Marvin Culbreth.

¹⁸⁹ Anne Weatherford, telephone conversation with author, March 16, 2010.

Weatherford was not dressed as suitably for the occasion as Lula Belle's father expected. Dr. Trawick told the young Weatherford not to return to dinner in the future without proper attire. In later years Weatherford always dressed for the nightly meal in coat and tie, and Anne Weatherford regarded this earlier experience as contributing to this tradition.

Sadly, Weatherford's marriage to Trawick lasted for only a brief time. In 1907 he faced another crisis, this one more real and personal than his struggle with faith that he had wrestled with in 1900. Since December 1903 Weatherford and Lula Belle had been making their lives together as he worked for the YMCA. But in June 1907 tragedy struck. Just as Weatherford was completing his doctoral work on Browning and his book was coming out, Lula Belle died while giving birth to their first child, a daughter.¹⁹⁰ The baby did not survive either, and their deaths left Weatherford devastated. As he worked through this terrible misfortune, he no longer was facing the meaning of suffering in the abstract as he had with his graduate work. While he never recorded how he came to peace with this event (perhaps he never did), one wonders if he reevaluated his earlier understanding of the purpose of evil. Near the end of his own life Weatherford would remember this signal event and recall that it was the start of "eight of the loneliest years any young man ever had."¹⁹¹ In this period of struggle Weatherford would throw himself into his YMCA work, the development of the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training, and the issue of race relations in the South. He would also

¹⁹⁰ See "Willis Duke Weatherford Sr. and ancestors" photo album, Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina; and "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Lula Belle apparently died of "uremic poisoning." See Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 61.

¹⁹¹ "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

spend time traveling the world. In the midst of these activities, he again would find a partner. Yet, the death of his first wife and daughter remained a powerful and painful memory that he hardly ever commented on, and this tragedy would sadly foreshadow another personal struggle he would face with his second wife.

Overall Weatherford's move from Texas to Tennessee represented a shift both in geography and perspective. His time in Nashville put him in touch with a world that was far removed from that of his small town Texas upbringing. His own background, together with his Vanderbilt experience and marriage into the Trawick family, cemented his southern Victorian outlook. In future years Weatherford would maintain an abiding respect and nostalgia for the Old South and intense pride in his native region. Nevertheless, Weatherford came to hold other values as well. Through his higher education, urban living, analysis of his religious beliefs, and exposure to African Americans he had become a particular sort of liberal on matters of race and religion for this time, that of the southern variety.

Chapter 2—A Respectable Religious Message: W. D. Weatherford, the Southern YMCA, and Race, 1901–1919

Shortly before Wilma Dykeman's *Prophet of Plenty* was published in 1966, Willis Duke Weatherford Jr. wrote his father with his reaction to her portrayal of the elder Weatherford. After reading the page proof the son commented that he thought she had "done a magnificent job" but went on to offer one critique of her work.¹ He observed, "The only part of your career which did not come through to me clearly was your first 20 years of devotion to Christian commitment among college youth."²

Weatherford Jr. was referring to Weatherford Sr.'s service with the YMCA student movement in the years between 1901 and 1919. In this period he worked as the Association secretary for colleges of the southern region of the United States. Growing out of his graduate school experience, Weatherford held a deep interest in the philosophical foundations of Christianity and felt a need to appeal to students (as well as some professors) in light of the fact that "evolution, higher criticism," and certain "phases of psychology" had shaken faith in this era.³ As a YMCA leader it became Weatherford's goal to "present a religion which had genuine intellectual content."⁴ By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Weatherford also began to expand his message to include social issues as well. This chapter explores this important period in Weatherford's life, particularly focusing on his involvement in the southern YMCA and

¹ Willis Weatherford to W. D. Weatherford, October 4, 1966, Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina. The letter is actually inserted into W. D. Weatherford's personal and marked copy of Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966).

² Weatherford to Weatherford, October 4, 1966, Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

³ See unpaginated notebook titled "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

⁴ *Ibid.*

the importance of that organization for colleges of the South. Moreover, it illuminates Weatherford's formal entry into race relations, concentrating on his publication of race-related texts and his participation in interracial organizations. Overall, in these years Weatherford sought to present Christian faith as intellectually respectable and engage the South's major social issue of the time, race.

When Weatherford entered YMCA service at the beginning of the twentieth century the organization was flourishing in the United States. In that period the agency was much more explicitly Christian than the institution it has become since. Today the Y—as it came to be called—usually brings to mind a workout facility with a vaguely Christian foundation that provides a gymnasium, pool, and sponsors recreational activities and swimming lessons. Yet in the late 1800s and early 1900s this predominantly Protestant interdenominational body thrived across the country serving a variety of constituencies, including young men in the cities, the armed services, rural areas, railroads and industrial organizations, and colleges.⁵ It offered a host of activities and programs including prayer groups, Bible studies, libraries and reading areas, athletic facilities, educational courses, and boarding spaces.⁶ Indeed, by 1900 on American college campuses it proved particularly influential, serving as the largest ministry group with nearly 32,000 student members in 559 YMCAs at a point when there were only 237,592 undergraduates.⁷

⁵ C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, (New York: Association Press, 1951), 179–244.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷ David P. Setran, *The College "Y": Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4 and 63.

The Y was not an American born institution; instead its roots stretched back to the 1840s in London, England.⁸ At that time it was essentially one of many humanitarian responses to the industrial revolution and urbanization. George Williams, an apprentice in the drapery trade, was a newcomer to the city and he, along with some of his fellow workers, organized a prayer group in light of the supposed poor moral conditions in which they found themselves.⁹ Their club inspired similar gatherings among other businesses in London, and on June 6, 1844, this society was officially organized as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The intent of this organization, as one of the original founders noted at the time, was "to influence young men to spread the Redeemer's Kingdom amongst those by whom they are surrounded."¹⁰ The group catered to white-collar workers rather than industrial laborers, drawing most of its participants from the middle classes.¹¹ In the context of this period the Association proved to be a fitting scheme and setup, and by 1851 it extended throughout sixteen cities in England, Ireland, and Scotland.

YMCAs also soon began to organize in the United States. Visitors to London, particularly in the summer of that year to the Great Industrial Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, were exposed to this organization's structure and ideals, taking back ideas to create their own Associations in their home cities.¹² The first of these appeared in Boston in 1851.¹³ The YMCA's program and arrangement proved to be suited to the needs of the time for America's growing urban areas, and by 1855 "virtually every major city and

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 4–5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6; and Sherwood Eddy, *A Century With Youth: A History of Y.M.C.A. from 1844 to 1944* (New York: Association Press, 1944), 129.

¹² Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 16–17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

many smaller ones had” this institution.¹⁴ Most of these early American YMCAs focused heavily on evangelism and providing “wholesome” activities for young men who had recently moved to the cities.¹⁵ As it ministered to this group, this organization was also strongly concerned with “reformation of character, the improvement of human relationships, and the inculcation of simple values.”¹⁶ Victorian notions of respectability and purity remained important in this burgeoning movement.

The YMCA, however, was not the first society that had catered to urban youth.¹⁷ According to C. Howard Hopkins, historian of the North American YMCA movement, during the 1840s and 1850s “[a]lmost every American city or town had . . . its Young Men’s Library Association, Mechanics Institute, or Young Men’s Society for Religious Improvement.”¹⁸ Yet Hopkins implies that the London YMCA program became the standard institution for this age group because it provided the “most effective” approach “for enlisting youth in religious activity and in spiritual and moral improvement.”¹⁹ The growth of the YMCA in the U. S. was also likely aided by the fact that it gained the support of evangelical Protestant churches rather than competed with them.²⁰ Moreover, among the many services YMCAs offered, the lists of “respectable” boarding places as well as job-finding assistance programs were particularly helpful in bringing to their doors young men adjusting to city life.²¹ Beginning in the latter part of the 1850s Y’s

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵ While the Y was clearly created to serve men, women were also involved in these early years and some even allowed membership. The YWCA (organized 1872) provided women with their own organization. See *Ibid.*, 39 and 292.

¹⁶ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19–21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

also increased their appeal by adding gymnasiums and athletic programs.²² Finally, the YMCA secured its place among religious organizations through its leaders' skillful ability to connect with and gain financial support from wealthy businessmen and benefactors. All in all, the YMCA proved to be a well-intentioned though fairly paternalistic agency.²³

In the latter half of the 1850s this movement began taking root on American college campuses, both in public and private institutions.²⁴ Between 1857 and 1859 undergraduates at the University of Michigan organized the Students' Christian Association.²⁵ On October 12, 1858, University of Virginia students established a YMCA.²⁶ The network of YMCAs continued to expand to other higher learning centers in the 1860s, including the University of North Carolina, Grinnell College, Olivet College, Cornell University, University of Mississippi, College of the City of New York, Washington College (which became Washington and Lee), and Howard University.²⁷ Like the work at local city branches, the early college YMCAs featured similar programs

²² *Ibid.*, 32.

²³ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

²⁴ See Setran, *The College "Y"*; Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 271–308 and 625–656; Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852–1946* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Eddy, *A Century With Youth*; William H. Morgan, *Student Religion During Fifty Years: Programs and Policies of the Intercollegiate Y.M.C.A.* (New York: Association Press, 1935); and Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: Their Origin and Intercollegiate Life* (New York: Association Press, 1934).

²⁵ Shedd, *Two Centuries*, 94–97.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 98; and W. D. Weatherford, "History of the Student Young Men's Christian Association in the South," [1949], p. 5, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. There is also some debate whether Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee organized a YMCA in 1856. See Shedd, *Two Centuries*, 93–94; Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 37–38; Weatherford, "History of the Student Young Men's Christian Association in the South," [1949], p. 1–4, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; and Winstead Paine Bone, *A History of Cumberland University, 1842–1935* (Lebanon, Tennessee: Author, 1935), 95–96.

²⁷ Setran, *The College "Y"*, 20.

as well as prayer groups, Sunday school outreach ministries, and religious lecture series.²⁸

Several factors explain the success the YMCA student movement experienced in the colleges in this period. Timing, in particular, was a key issue. The Y's at Michigan and Virginia were apparently an outgrowth of revivals occurring across the nation and on their campuses in those years.²⁹ At the latter, a new organization—despite the existence already of a Student's Prayer Meeting and a Society for Missionary Inquiry—developed to extend the results of the new religious fervor and channel further Christian activities and interests.³⁰ The truth is that colleges (like cities) had long had a variety of religious organizations before the advent of YMCAs to serve their students, including local prayer and missions groups, temperance associations, and clubs that discussed spiritual and ethical concerns.³¹ Yet the Y, with its broadly ecumenical approach, offered a new, larger organizational structure into which schools could tap. Many of these former groups also found the YMCA appealing because it allowed them to organize new Y chapters while carrying on traditions of the earlier societies.³² Moreover the YMCA, with its international organization, connected college chapters and students across the country and with other nations.³³ Thus, these young men gained opportunities for fellowship with one another along with access to well-known speakers and Christian figures. The latter was true because, as part of a broad network of Associations, it was

²⁸ Weatherford, "History of the Student Young Men's Christian Association in the South," [1949], p. 20, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

²⁹ Setran, *The College "Y"*, 17–19; and Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 38.

³⁰ Setran, *The College "Y"*, 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 28–29; and Shedd, *Two Centuries*.

³² Setran, *The College "Y"*, 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, 27.

easier to secure such visitors.³⁴ Protestant and evangelical, and with a well-established structure, the YMCA was broad enough theologically and organizationally to suit the religious and social interests of a wide variety of American college students.

The collegiate movement also proved successful because of support provided by the larger organizing body of YMCA, the International Committee.³⁵ Over time this entity increasingly gave attention to building and nurturing collegiate programs. Several early YMCA leaders in the late 1860s, Robert Weidensall and Luther Wishard in particular, proved pivotal in promoting and fostering this work.³⁶ Weidensall was the first traveling secretary of the International Committee, and his responsibilities included broad interest in city and state YMCAs.³⁷ His duties also extended to student work, where he visited colleges, set up chapters, and revived and reorganized declining Associations. In 1877 what was known as “the student movement” of the YMCA became officially recognized by the larger North American international body; at the time there were twenty-six associations at the collegiate level.³⁸ With this pronouncement came the creation of the office of a secretary for taking “care of the general work of the Associations in Colleges, and other higher educational institutions.”³⁹ While these activities had been a component of Weidensall’s responsibilities in the previous year, Wishard (a recent Princeton graduate) was hired to exclusively conduct this work, becoming the first YMCA student secretary. Serving part-time while pursuing further

³⁴ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 276.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 117; and Setran, *The College “Y”*, 3–4.

³⁶ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 120, 271, and 276.

³⁷ Setran, *The College “Y”*, 24–25; and Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 120–122.

³⁸ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 278; and Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” [1949], p. 9, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. It is unclear if these twenty-six included ones in Canada.

³⁹ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 278.

studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Wishard helped build the student organizations through written correspondence, personal trips to schools, and the publication of a student oriented periodical, *The College Bulletin*.⁴⁰ In 1879 Wishard's post became full time, and he intensified his activities by writing fifteen hundred letters, distributing twenty thousand copies of the eight issues of his magazine, and meeting with thirty-one colleges in the United States and Canada.⁴¹ At the end of that year his efforts proved fruitful as membership in college YMCAs rose to over 4000 students in 96 chapters. Over a decade later in 1891 the total student movement had grown to 345 organizations with more than 22,000 members. Wishard's traveling work among colleges was the type of position Weatherford would later occupy when he became the YMCA secretary for the South and Southwest regions.

Southern college YMCAs had a strong presence in the early student movement. Indeed, nine of the original twenty-six associations in 1877 were in the South, and there is some evidence that an additional eleven southern schools also had Y's.⁴² Part of the organization's success in this region was due to an intentional effort of "outreach" on the part of the International Committee following the Civil War.⁴³ While this conflict had divided northern and southern Associations during this period, there had never been a formal separate "southern federation" created as had been the case with some of the major Protestant denominations.⁴⁴ Yet southern YMCAs in all forms, including college branches, were "virtually wiped out" by the end of the war, "there being only two or three

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 280–281.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴² Weatherford, "History of the Student Young Men's Christian Association in the South," [1949], p. 9, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

⁴³ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 132.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

that kept up some shadow of existence.”⁴⁵ Some of the specific efforts made to reestablish fellowship between the two sections included New York YMCA members giving money in 1867 to enable southerners to attend the international convention in Montreal and the decision to hold the 1875 convention in Richmond, Virginia.⁴⁶ Beginning intensely in 1872, Weidensall also spent a large portion of his time trying “‘to bring the Southern folks into practical alliance’ again” through his work in city and college branches (black and white), state organizations, and by encouraging participation in international YMCA gatherings.⁴⁷ These efforts brought results, particularly among student Associations, with thirty-four chapters active by 1880—making up roughly a third of the ninety-six existing ones at the time across the United States and Canada.⁴⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century the collegiate YMCA in the South had become, as was the case in American movement overall, the predominant campus ministry organization.⁴⁹ The Y was thus positioned for an influential role among this region’s students.

With the rise of the student movement, YMCA college leaders increased their attention and specialized their work among this constituency. Beginning in 1883 state conferences were created, with regional and national meetings soon to follow, all devoted exclusively to student needs and issues.⁵⁰ Prior to this time when the North American YMCAs’ international convention met, specific departments of YMCA outreach—in this case student work—were given only limited attention as part of the larger program.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 132–133.

⁴⁸ Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” [1949], p. 11, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

⁴⁹ Setran, *The College “Y”*, 3–4.

⁵⁰ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 294.

Wishard concluded that collegiate Associations, while they should continue their involvement in these international gatherings, needed their own assemblies to allow for more focused attention to their particular needs and interests. Railroad Associations had already taken a similar step in 1877, thus Wishard moved in 1883 to begin state meetings of college YMCAs. Then in 1886 the first national summer student conference was held under the leadership of Wishard and the evangelist Dwight L. Moody in Mt. Hermon, near the latter's home in Northfield, Massachusetts.⁵¹ This event brought together 235 students from ninety-six college YMCAs, many from outside the Northeast.⁵² The conference included Bible study, worship services, recreation activities, lectures, and discussions of YMCA programs and procedures. Following this gathering's apparent success, organizers decided to plan a similar one for the next year to be held at Northfield where more ample "accommodations" could be provided.⁵³ In subsequent years this location became the annual destination.

The Northfield idea expanded in future years, leading to the development of new conference sites serving various other U. S. regions. The need for additional locations was probably largely due to travel time and costs students faced if they lived far from Massachusetts. Furthermore, as the movement grew, it is likely different parts of the country confronted particular regional issues that might be better solved through their own meetings. The first extension took place in 1890 as students from the Midwestern and western colleges met at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.⁵⁴ In the coming years this location would become a permanent fixture for that section of the country's students, and it was at

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 295 and 300.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 296.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁵⁴ Shedd, *Two Centuries*, 309; and Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 637.

one of these gatherings in 1894 that Weatherford (while still a student at Weatherford College) came to know George Washington Carver.

The South soon followed with its own student conference. In 1892 southern leaders put on their first region-wide gathering at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.⁵⁵ This meeting was under the direction of Fletcher S. Brockman, who in the previous year, after finishing his undergraduate studies at Vanderbilt, had become the first “student secretary set aside for a specific region.”⁵⁶ Apparently in this period the student movement in the South was in the midst of a “struggling” phase, and there remained a number of schools still untouched by it.⁵⁷ Despite Brockman’s evident enthusiasm, the South was still slow to find its own permanent meeting place. Indeed, in 1893 and 1894 no conference was held in this region, its students having to attend either Northfield or Lake Geneva.⁵⁸ In the coming years what became the “Southern Student Conference” met in a variety of settings in the mountains of North Carolina, in or within a short distance from Asheville. This arrangement included gatherings at Bingham School (1896–1901); the Asheville School for Boys (1902, 1903, and 1905); Haywood White Sulphur Springs Hotel in Waynesville, North Carolina (1904); Farm School (later Warren Wilson College) in Swannanoa, North Carolina (1906–1907); and Montreat,

⁵⁵ Shedd, *Two Centuries*, 309–311; Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 637; and Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” [1949], p. 13, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. While African American students apparently did not attend this or any of the early southern conferences, there is no evidence indicating that this region’s YMCA leaders created this gathering primarily because of the issue of race.

⁵⁶ Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” [1949], p. 13, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; and W. D. Weatherford, “Facts About the Student Movement in the South,” [1927], p. 1, folder 487a, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers #3831, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

⁵⁷ Shedd, *Two Centuries*, 311.

⁵⁸ Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” [1949], p. 14, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

North Carolina (1908–1911). Finally, in 1912 the South's summer assembly would find its long-time home at a place called Blue Ridge near Black Mountain, North Carolina, an institution of Weatherford's creation.⁵⁹

Blue Ridge's development began in 1906. At this time Weatherford was frustrated with the southern YMCA's chaotic selection of gathering locations.⁶⁰ Weatherford was vitally interested in making the YMCA in the South strong and respectable, and he wanted this region to have its own place comparable to the other Y centers at Northfield and Lake Geneva.⁶¹ According to Wilma Dykeman, Weatherford's idea for Blue Ridge sprang up after the summer of 1904 when he and Lula Belle vacationed "on the North Fork of the beautiful Swannanoa River in Western North Carolina."⁶² Apparently Weatherford developed an affinity for the region and thought the area might be a fitting location to build a YMCA conference center. Moreover, there was already precedent for having it in the North Carolina mountains as the Southern Student Conference had gathered there since 1896. As Weatherford tried to find a suitable site he considered the Montreat property; however, because this place was already an established area with over thirty residences, he thought there might be too much "social life which would be detrimental" to his purposes.⁶³ As he continued to

⁵⁹ It should be noted that African Americans students or participants were not welcome at these conferences. Not until 1912 did southern blacks have a summer gathering to attend. At this point Kings Mountain, North Carolina became the site for black male students. See Hopkins, *History of YMCA in North America*, 638; and Willis D. Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association, the Interracial Committee and Related Subjects," [1949], p. 24, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. According to William Hunton, the first African American YMCA secretary, financial issues also played a part in blacks not being able to have their own assemblies until 1912. Specific reasons included the cost of travel as well as the need for African American students to work during their summer breaks. See Setran, *The College "Y"*, 78.

⁶⁰ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56–62.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶³ C. A. Rowland to W. D. Weatherford, July 21, 1952, folder 3807, Weatherford Papers.

search an Asheville judge, who was aware of Weatherford's interest, advised Weatherford of another tract of land near the town of Black Mountain that he thought would be "an ideal location."⁶⁴ On October 6, 1906, Dr. A. L. Phillips, a friend of Weatherford's who worked with the Presbyterian Sunday School Board in Richmond, Virginia, accompanied Weatherford to view this site, determining it to be nearly perfect. In the end the land was bought and the building project soon proceeded. How the entire Blue Ridge venture was financed is unclear, but in 1906 Weatherford did secure \$50,000 for the project from John D. Rockefeller Sr. Weatherford likely raised the rest of the money through business leaders and philanthropic organizations in the North and South, as he continued to do over the years. As president of this center for nearly forty years, Weatherford and the institution's philosophy and aims remained largely indistinguishable until his retirement in 1944.⁶⁵ From the beginning, as Weatherford noted, "A basic purpose of Blue Ridge . . . was to give to religious life in the South intellectual respectability."⁶⁶

Weatherford's activities in the YMCA had begun at Weatherford College with his involvement intensifying during his studies at Vanderbilt University. Serving as president of the latter's campus Y for two years while a graduate student, Weatherford went on to larger work in this organization. In 1901, in the midst of his doctoral

⁶⁴ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 59 and 61.

⁶⁵ It should be noted that Weatherford was specifically responsible for organizing the YMCA Graduate School's summer quarter and Blue Ridge's August program. The later made available lectures by prominent speakers to summer guests vacationing at the conference center. YMCA and YWCA student conferences and other gatherings had their own planning committees that chose their speakers and programs. Nevertheless, these planners still kept Weatherford abreast of conference agendas. For example, when the YMCA Southern Student Conference made plans in 1928 to bring John Hope—then the African American president of Morehouse College—one of the committee members wrote to Weatherford. See C. B. Loomis to W. D. Weatherford, May 17, 1928, folder 730, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁶ W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College at Vanderbilt," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina

coursework, he took a part-time position as the YMCA state student secretary of Tennessee.⁶⁷ In September 1902 he went on full-time with the Y, becoming the secretary for the entire southern region under the employment of the YMCA's International Committee.

Due to the student movement's growth in this period, college YMCA secretarial work underwent expansion at all levels—local, state, regional, and national. Significant changes in the YMCA's high administrative levels also took place. In 1888 Wishard left the student movement for foreign missions, and a recent Cornell University graduate and rising star in the YMCA, John R. Mott, took an associate secretary position under Charles Kellogg Ober, who had replaced Wishard as senior student secretary.⁶⁸ In 1890 Mott moved into Ober's role as the head of the student movement, an office he would hold until 1915.⁶⁹ Mott, who became a critical figure in the YMCA in these years, was skillful at developing this organization. Indeed, he recognized his own limited capabilities and created more supervisory positions to help in this process.⁷⁰ In 1891 he began preparing small teams of students to work with the schools in their states, effectively forming state student secretaries. At the regional level, he strove to increase the number of secretaries serving the eastern, western, and southern parts of the country.⁷¹ In 1901 Weatherford worked at the state level for Tennessee. His next step in 1902 was regional employment.

⁶⁷ "W. D. Weatherford," in "YMCA Graduate School (1930) forms," folder 1048, Weatherford Papers; "Some Facts about W. D. Weatherford – Written at the Request of H. P. Anderson," [1902], Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; and unpaginated notebook titled "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

⁶⁸ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 283, and 302–303; and Setran, *The College "Y"*, 62–63.

⁶⁹ Setran, *The College "Y"*, 5 and 63.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

The complete story behind Weatherford's quick rise in the YMCA is not fully known. Weatherford originally entered Vanderbilt in 1897 with the intention of preparing himself to be a minister. Even at that time—he would have been twenty-two—it is likely he had already been ordained as a Methodist pastor, perhaps by his local Texas conference.⁷² Yet something changed Weatherford's mind, and he shifted his sights to the YMCA. As his involvement increased with this organization, it seems fairly logical that he would have considered full-time work there, perhaps expecting this to be only a temporary setup. Remember, in 1902 he was in the midst of completing his doctoral coursework with only his dissertation to write before he would have his Ph. D. Therefore, Weatherford may have only planned to work with the YMCA while he was finishing this final degree requirement. On March 1 of that year Weatherford received a wire from Mott asking him to not accept any employment before his assistant, Hans P. Anderson, could speak with him in person.⁷³ Weatherford met with Mott's representative soon thereafter and was offered the International Student Secretaryship for the Southern and Southwestern States. Weatherford agreed to take the assignment for three years with only one condition, that he would "not have to raise money."⁷⁴ As it turns out the three-year term extended much longer, for he stayed in this role for nearly seventeen years. His sole stipulation also ultimately proved unrealistic as he "soon found things [he] knew

⁷² Exactly when Weatherford was ordained is unclear but at least one document suggests this event occurred before he moved to Tennessee in 1897. This source notes that after he finished Weatherford College, "With eyes on the pulpit, he was ordained a Methodist Minister, but other service claimed him. . ." See P. Whitwell Wilson, "The Projectile from the South," *Association Men* (October 1925), p. 59, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. One other letter attests to his ordained status but does not indicate when this occurred. See "Office Secretary" of Blue Ridge Association to P. F. Jerome, May 28, 1914, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

⁷³ W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, "College Life and Main Objectives," Weatherford family papers; and Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 41.

⁷⁴ Weatherford, "College Life and Main Objectives," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

should be done, but could not without money to back them.”⁷⁵ Indeed, Weatherford became a master fundraiser, estimating near the end of his life that he had secured over \$10 million in donations for the various organizations of which he was associated. While working as a traveling secretary Weatherford remained “ABD” (all but dissertation) until 1907, when he finally completed his Browning study. In the end, instead of following the traditional path of being a church pastor, the ministry Weatherford chose for his life work was with the Y.

Weatherford entered the YMCA in its heyday. In 1902, across the United States 681 college branches existed with a membership of nearly 42,000.⁷⁶ Combined attendance at the regional summer conferences (Northfield; Lake Geneva; Bingham School near Asheville, North Carolina; and Pacific Grove, California) in the previous year totaled more than 1400 students.⁷⁷ At the movement’s height in 1920 (just one year after Weatherford left the secretaryship) 764 American colleges and universities had YMCAs with a membership exceeding 80,000.⁷⁸ In the period during which Weatherford worked for the YMCA, between 25 and 30 percent of male students in higher education were involved in the Y.

Weatherford’s position as the traveling college secretary for the South included a variety of responsibilities. Chief among these duties was visiting approximately 200 public and private institutions in fourteen states across the region.⁷⁹ His work took him to as many as 50 colleges a year, from Virginia in the Upper South, down to Florida, and as

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Setran, *The College “Y”*, 74.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4

⁷⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 41.

far west as Texas and Oklahoma.⁸⁰ Over time he also would visit colleges outside this region including the University of Iowa, University of Nebraska, Northwestern, Oberlin, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State, University of Washington, and the University of Wyoming, “in fact in practically every state in the Union.”⁸¹ The majority of his focus was on the white colleges, but he apparently did visit some African American schools, mainly in the years after 1910 when he began to turn more attention to the issue of race relations.⁸² Collegiate black YMCAs were under the responsibility of the Colored Work Department in these years, not with the student department of the YMCA.⁸³ Spending as many as four days at the largest of these institutions, Weatherford met personally with faculty and students and also made addresses (sometimes as many as four per day) to larger gatherings of YMCA groups and at times, even the general student body.⁸⁴ According to Weatherford’s later memories of these years, he lectured on a variety of concerns, noting, “I spoke on honesty, real study and what it meant, Christian life, life dedication or calling, on what religion could do for students and was hard on

⁸⁰ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 45; and Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁸¹ See W. D. Weatherford’s personal notebook titled “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

⁸² Weatherford visited the historically black college, Hampton Institute on September 10, 1911 along with Jackson Davis (Superintendent of Negro Rural Schools in Virginia) and spoke to students on “clean life.” See “At Home and Afield: Hampton Incidents, Addresses,” p. 590, *Southern Workman* 40 (October 1911). He also visited Piney Woods School near Jackson, Mississippi (date unknown). See Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁸³ Setran, *The College “Y”*, 78. This would remain the case until 1933 when African American college YMCA work was integrated at the national level (this action would take until 1937 in the southeast region). The Colored Work Department however remained in existence until 1946. See Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 648; Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” [1949], p. 46–47, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; and Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 116 and 127.

⁸⁴ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 45–47.

college evils such as cheating, drunkenness etc.”⁸⁵ In general his addresses were appeals for religious living with an emphasis on personal conduct, all strongly influenced by his Victorian perspective.

In the early period of his service Weatherford primarily focused on changing individual lives. He believed strongly in one’s ability, through personal effort and willpower, to overcome weaknesses in character and develop deeper Christian faith. Yet Weatherford’s concentration came at some cost. It resulted in his giving less attention to social matters and the structural causes underlying these problems.⁸⁶ Even as Weatherford became more interested in public issues in the coming years, he maintained and carried this emphasis on the individual, perhaps inhibiting him from examining the root cause of societal dilemmas where solutions lay beyond character reformation.

In the first decade of his student YMCA employment Weatherford also concentrated heavily on presenting religion in rational terms. Basically he tried to defend belief in Christianity at a time when faith was being challenged by new scientific knowledge. Evolutionary theories, and particularly the application of the historical critical method to the Bible, seem to have gathered real strength in southern colleges and universities after 1900, obviously later than had been the case in Europe and even the northern United States.⁸⁷ Weatherford attempted to engage with, rather than ignore, these competing truth claims. He recognized that “A religion that is not rationally based cannot stand up under the strain of modern life.”⁸⁸ Recall that at this time Weatherford

⁸⁵ Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁸⁶ See Setran, *The College “Y”*, 140.

⁸⁷ See Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

himself was not far removed from his own crisis of faith, and he must have also wanted to help other serious-minded religious students undergoing similar doubts.

Weatherford's approach was to appeal more to their heads than to their hearts.

To aid him in this task Weatherford devoted himself to further studies of his own in this period. It appears he was very intentional in this process, choosing specific subjects each year to cover and then gathering relevant readings. The fields of comparative religions, philosophy of religion, and psychology of religion were the first "themes" he chose, and these "consumed most of [his] time for the first ten years" of his student work.⁸⁹ Since he was traveling, usually by train, he also apparently made it his habit to try to read a book each week.⁹⁰ This devotion to reading, while perhaps not at this same intense level, continued in future years as he expanded his interests to some of the most current works in religion, history, and literature.⁹¹

Several stories from Weatherford's early years as secretary for the South and Southwest exemplify how his interest in intellectual concerns affected his appeal and gained students' attention. The first comes from a visit he made to the University of Iowa. Here three Hindu students "challenged [Weatherford's] claim that Jesus was the greatest religious leader that ever lived," insisting Weatherford had no basis for comparison since he had not read their "great religious books."⁹² Weatherford countered that indeed he had studied some of their sacred texts, including the Bhagavad Gita and

⁸⁹ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁹⁰ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 50.

⁹¹ Weatherford had the habit of recording the new books he was reading at the end of his yearly datebooks. For example in his 1948 book he recorded reading Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1948); in 1956 he included C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); and in 1967, William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (New York: Random House, 1967). See 1948, 1956, and 1967 datebooks in possession of author.

⁹² Weatherford, "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

the Upanishads. According to Weatherford's memory of this incident, the students on hearing this news were "amazed—and willing to listen."⁹³ Weatherford noted that "Almost every state university I visited had one or more of Asia's choicest minds and they could only be reached by a fair evaluation of their religious leaders and thought in comparison with Biblical Prophets and Jesus."⁹⁴ To what extent Weatherford was able to give these other religions a sympathetic and open-minded reading in the context of his time and with the scholarly materials he had available is unclear, and perhaps doubtful, but his efforts to at least familiarize himself with these traditions was likely an unusual step for a southern YMCA secretary of the early twentieth century.

Another episode exemplifying Weatherford's effort to defend Christian belief has to do with his encountering a religious skeptic at the University of Arkansas. Henry Ingersoll, the nephew of the famous American agnostic Robert Ingersoll, was then a student at the state school. In Weatherford's telling of the story Ingersoll was poised for an "argument" about religion and God when Weatherford visited there in the early 1900s.⁹⁵ As Ingersoll engaged Weatherford in debate, the latter shifted the conversation to allow the young man to list the key issues with which he objected. Weatherford himself then became the critic, pointing out to Ingersoll what he considered to be other "more basic and important" points that Ingersoll had overlooked.⁹⁶ Weatherford went on to raise additional questions to the young man and then offered a reading list of books that addressed these concerns. A year later Weatherford returned to Arkansas to visit and

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* For a slightly different version of this story see W. D. Weatherford, *Introducing Men to Christ: Fundamental Studies* (New York: Association Press, 1911), 136–137.

⁹⁶ Weatherford, "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

met Ingersoll again. To Weatherford's inquiry "how does your thinking respond to my books?" Ingersoll replied "I cannot say I am a Christian but it seems to me the books are true."⁹⁷ Weatherford took this as a good sign. Engaging students with a rational argument for belief remained a key goal throughout Weatherford's traveling work.

Weatherford's YMCA responsibilities also extended beyond college students to include work with professors and college administrators. He later recalled numerous occasions when he discussed religious matters with these teachers and officials who also had been affected by scientific challenges to their beliefs. Overall, it is clear Weatherford believed Christianity was the best religion to follow, and he tried to lead people to this faith through a more rational approach rather than emotional one. Truthfully, this plea was never a highly analytically rigorous appeal, but he labored with a decided bent in this direction.

Weatherford went on to become something of a legend in southern YMCA circles in this period. He came to consider his work with students highly successful, and in later years many of them attested to his influence on their lives.⁹⁸ Beyond his regional travels, Weatherford added to his reputation through the publication of two devotional studies, *Introducing Men to Christ* (1911) and *Christian Life, A Normal Experience* (1916). In both pieces Weatherford targeted college students and YMCA leaders, outlining why they should believe in Christianity and how they should live a Christian life. Moreover,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ In 1955 a man who attended the University of Texas between 1911 and 1915 wrote Weatherford referring to him as "'Mr. Student YMCA' – at least for the South" of that time. See Jesse R. Wilson to W. D. Weatherford, December 21, 1955, folder 3812, Weatherford Papers. In 1969 a former student YMCA president of the University of Georgia noted Weatherford's influence on him when Weatherford came to speak in Athens in 1910. See E. P. Hall to W. D. Weatherford, January 14, 1969, Weatherford Papers. See also French W. Thompson to W. D. Weatherford, April 4, 1944, folder 3306, Weatherford Papers; and Robert L. Kincaid to W. D. Weatherford, February 2, 1945, folder 3313, Weatherford Papers.

he used numerous anecdotes from his YMCA travels to illustrate his points and connect with his audience. The books exemplified his interest in making religion intellectually respectable, particularly in the sections where he engaged with the challenges the field of psychology had made to faith and also in the pages that compared Christianity with other religions and philosophies of life.⁹⁹ Apparently more than 15,000 students studied *Introducing Men to Christ*, leading to the publication of *Christian Life, A Normal Experience* to build on the earlier text and provide a guide for “more mature workers,” presumably graduate students and YMCA secretaries.¹⁰⁰ Overall, these published works helped make Weatherford a well-known figure in southern YMCA work. By 1913 Weatherford had even found his way into the chorus of the official Southern Student Conference song.¹⁰¹

Other factors also explain his achievements. Certainly his youth in the early years of his YMCA career probably played a role by making it easy for students to identify with him. Moreover, Weatherford had a fraternity background, and he directed many of his appeals in colleges toward this group. Members of these orders were likely to be campus leaders and influential in social circles, thereby making them an attractive group for the YMCA to reach. Weatherford was also added by his “high energy.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See Weatherford, *Introducing Men to Christ*, 11–12, 31–44, and 47–60; and W. D. Weatherford, *Christian Life, A Normal Experience* (Nashville, Dallas, and Richmond: Smith & Lamar, Agents, 1916), 43–57, 59–73, and 75–89.

¹⁰⁰ Weatherford, *Christian Life*, 5.

¹⁰¹ The line went “Weatherford is always here.” See “Conference Song, 1913,” in W. D. Weatherford, *Songs of Southern Colleges and Old Southern Melodies* (Nashville: Southern Students Secretaries of YMCA, 1913), 78.

¹⁰² See Anne Weatherford, personal interview, September 11, 2009, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina. Interview in possession of author.

Contemporary sources and later testimonies attest repeatedly to this quality.¹⁰³ Frank Porter Graham, a United States senator (1949–1950) and president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1930–1949) as a Chapel Hill undergraduate in the late 1900s encountered Weatherford. Graham later described Weatherford in the following terms: “There were no bounds to [his] energy and his devotion as he went from state to state and college to college. He had no patience with sloth, complacency, or low standards in religion, personal life, scholarship, athletics, and campus citizenship.”¹⁰⁴ Weatherford’s vigor and drive helped him to be an effective and engaging speaker and also gave him the ability to invest himself in many projects and cultivate countless relationships.

Weatherford’s active lifestyle and approach also fit with a trend flourishing in American Protestantism and particularly manifest within the YMCA at the time known as “muscular Christianity.” At its height between 1880 and 1920, historian Clifford Putney has described this movement as a “Christian commitment to health and manliness.”¹⁰⁵ Proponents of this religious philosophy essentially emphasized that the body was the temple of God and that physical health was a vital part of being a Christian.¹⁰⁶ Indeed the body had a “higher purpose,” which “[i]nstead of just being a tool for labor” could also be “a tool for good, an agent to be used on behalf of social progress and world uplift.”¹⁰⁷ Muscular Christianity gained strength in part as a reaction to the supposed feminization

¹⁰³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 1 and 43; Wilson, “The Projectile from the South,” Kautz Family YMCA Archives; and Robert B. Eleazer, “My First Eighty Years: A Brief Account of My Life for Those Who Come After,” September 21, 1957, Box 1, Folder 24–26, p. 8, Robert Eleazer Papers, Special Collections & University Archives, Vanderbilt University Library, Nashville Tennessee.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 49–50.

¹⁰⁵ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2 and 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

of the church. With the advent of more bureaucratic and managerial jobs due to the urban-industrial transformation, some religious leaders thought that men were now separated from physical labor, thus lessening their masculinity. In short, proponents of muscular Christianity assumed that there were appropriate gender roles for Christian men, with personal fitness and “manliness” being central components of their ideal role. Only an intentional effort to cultivate a vigorous way of life could help Christian men regain their masculinity and revive the faith.

Weatherford personally embodied this conception and also sought out this characteristic in the students in which he came in contact. One episode in his travels particularly well illustrates Weatherford’s muscular Christian image. Early along in his role as southern student secretary, Weatherford traveled to Emory College in Georgia.¹⁰⁸ While Weatherford had been given time at the chapel meeting that day, the school’s president insisted that Weatherford need not plan for an evening session because he did not expect a good student turnout. As the story goes, Weatherford found this assumption unsatisfactory and devised a strategy to interest the undergraduates in attending his lecture. Weatherford went to the college’s gym, outfitted himself in exercise attire, and “challenged” some of the school’s “best athletes” to a “workout.”¹⁰⁹ Weatherford apparently was in good physical shape at the time, having recently left his graduate school post working in Vanderbilt’s physical education department. This incident attracted a number of students from around the campus, catching their attention. As

¹⁰⁸ See Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 46; and Setran, *The College “Y”*, 113–114. Neither of these sources note that he went to Emory. However this information was deduced by reading Weatherford’s personal copy of Dykeman’s book that include his comments, underlinings, and notes. This book is held in the library at Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

¹⁰⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 46.

Dykeman notes, “Students and faculty discovered that if Weatherford could give them a strenuous work-out on the gym floor, he could give them no less an energetic work-out from the platform.”¹¹⁰ Accordingly, Weatherford’s evening speech was well attended as were his future visits to the Methodist school.

Weatherford developed an interest in another issue in this period—one that initially posed the threat of alienating him from his southern constituency—but in time actually proved to attract many students. This concern was the condition of African Americans in the South, and on this subject Weatherford recognized there needed to be some changes in southern society. Later reflecting back on this time, Weatherford commented, “I spoke out boldly for justice for the Negro. Yes, some people caricatured me as carrying a Negro child—but I do not believe I lost the respect of any real student or professor because I spoke out boldly for the Negro.”¹¹¹ Along with making religion “intellectually respectable,” Weatherford considered his “second great task” of these years “to give the Negro people a new sense of dignity and make better relations between white and black.”¹¹² It is revealing that Weatherford did not think of this work in terms of bringing full political and social equality to blacks but rather in improving the conditions of the time. In truth, Weatherford did not wholly accept the idea that blacks and whites were completely equal. Like most other white southerners of this time—even some of the most liberal ones—Weatherford was unable to wrap his mind entirely around this concept. Growing up in a region so pervaded by white supremacy and in a period where segregation laws increasingly restricted the lives of African Americans, it was

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹¹ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹¹² Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

difficult for him to think differently. Yet going back to his exposure and personal connection to blacks in his Vanderbilt years, he had developed a growing interest in race relations. His travel throughout the South as a student secretary further contributed to this concern because these activities put him in close touch with the Jim Crow world of this region (particularly on the trains) and the “injustice” under which blacks lived.¹¹³ His YMCA work also gave him a very good sense of the racial attitudes of the South’s white students. From these experiences he determined that southern white college men largely had no understanding of black life and culture and practically no contact with middle- or upper-class African Americans. Race, Weatherford concluded, was an issue that no longer could be ignored.

Weatherford’s concern with racial issues involved him in a wider trend of reform characterizing this era. The movement, broadly termed Progressivism, affected Western Europe as well as the United States, gained increasing strength in the South at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹⁴ In general Progressivism, much like the YMCA, was a response to a world changed by industrialization and urbanization. A number of Progressive initiatives were aimed at protecting citizens from the excesses of capitalism. In the United States this movement was initiated largely by a “new middle class” as this group harnessed the power of government to enact legislation to provide new services and securities for the populace.¹¹⁵ Even as the South remained largely rural in this period—despite the growth of cities like Atlanta—reforms also begin touching this

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ On Progressivism see Williams A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); and Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁵ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 111.

region. Here, as one historian of this movement has described, “bureaucratic intervention in education, public health, child welfare, and public morality replaced traditional governance, which had relied on voluntarism and community control.”¹¹⁶ Child labor laws, work safety standards, clean water and food regulations, prohibition campaigns, and public education provisions represent only a few of the reforms enacted in this period. Yet the results these reformers brought applied “mostly for whites.”¹¹⁷ Voting requirements enacted in the late nineteenth century—including poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses—had largely disenfranchised African Americans in the South. Jim Crow laws that supposedly allowed for “separate but equal” facilities and accommodations seldom lived up to their claim. In this context a small group of southern Progressives began directing more attention to racial issues, most confronting the problem from a Christian faith perspective. Weatherford, with his religious emphasis and his middle-class outlook, fit among this group.

In 1908 Weatherford publicly entered this field. Sometime after his 1903 marriage he and his wife Lula Belle Trawick moved from Nashville to Atlanta (likely due to his YMCA work), making their home there until her death in June 1907.¹¹⁸ Following her passing and in the midst of this painful period, Weatherford returned to Nashville to set up his headquarters and share a home with his late wife’s sister Bess and her husband,

¹¹⁶ Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, xi.

¹¹⁷ John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region*, vol. 2, 3rd ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 445.

¹¹⁸ See Ada Trawick Culbreth, “The Culbreth Family Story,” p. 44–45, 48–49, and 64, Culbreth family papers, Waynesville, North Carolina. Ada—who later wrote this informal family history—was the oldest sister of Lula Belle and later married James Marvin Culbreth. Documents from the Culbreth family are held at the Waynesville, NC home of Elizabeth Culbreth, the granddaughter of James Marvin Culbreth.

James Marvin Culbreth.¹¹⁹ Therefore, Weatherford was likely still living in Atlanta when the violent Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 occurred.¹²⁰ Such an event and the general deteriorating race relations at the time prompted him to take action. In April 1908 Weatherford gathered together a small group of educators, clergymen, and YMCA secretaries at a “Y building” in Atlanta “to discuss the present race question, with special reference to what the college men of the South might do to better conditions.”¹²¹ Along with the conference’s subject, what made this event particularly extraordinary for its time was its interracial nature; the gathering consisted of four African American men and three white men.¹²² It notably included John Hope, the first black president of Atlanta Baptist College and a later significant figure in interracial movements, along with key leaders of the African American YMCA department.¹²³ Growing out of this one-day conference the group decided that Weatherford should prepare a textbook on southern black culture and living conditions to be used in study groups among this region’s student YMCAs. The finished product, published in 1910, was *Negro Life in the South*.

¹¹⁹ Culbreth, “Culbreth Family Story,” p. 48–49, Culbreth family papers. James Marvin originally married Bess Trawick but she died early in their marriage. He later married Ada Trawick.

¹²⁰ For more information on the Atlanta race riot see Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Jack C. Knight, “Reckoning with Violence: W. E. B. Du Bois and the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot,” *Journal of Southern History* 62 (November 1996): 727–766; Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001); Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875–1906* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 147–166; David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

¹²¹ W. D. Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions and Needs* (New York: Association Press, 1910), v; and Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. The specific YMCA building in which they met is unknown.

¹²² These black participants included John Hope (president of Atlanta Baptist College), John Wesley Gilbert (professor), William A. Hunton and Jesse E. Moorland (both YMCA secretaries). Besides Weatherford, the white men involved included W. R. Lambuth (Missionary Secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South) and Stewart R. Roberts (physiology professor at the Atlanta School of Physicians and Surgeons). See Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, v.

¹²³ For more information on Hope see Ridgely Torrence, *The Story of John Hope* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948).

In this book Weatherford balanced his adherence to southern tradition with a challenge for white southerners to treat African Americans more justly. With white southern YMCA college men as his central audience, he essentially argued that they should take an interest in African Americans, specifically learn more about their religious, economic, and home lives, and help in definite ways to elevate blacks and improve their condition. By today's standards the book seems hardly progressive but rather condescending and paternalistic in its tone at many points. Yet for its time and in the context of the segregated southern world, it would have been considered liberal. The fact that such a volume proved to elicit some backlash against Weatherford reveals much about this era's deep-seated racism.

In this text Weatherford made a number of appeals to his readers that clearly would have been seen as forward thinking for the time. Indeed, early in the book he "challenge[d]" the widely held white southern belief that they "know" their African American neighbors.¹²⁴ He countered that while this group probably did "know much more of real negro life than men of other sections can possibly know," they still actually understood very little about black culture.¹²⁵ Weatherford went on to advocate equal pay for black workers, as well as commensurable standards in housing, sanitation, and roads; the need for professional training for some blacks; reform schools for black youth; "justice" in the courts; and the end of lynching.¹²⁶ Moreover, even though he did not agree with the tactics of W. E. B. Du Bois, he did recognize and sympathize with what he saw as Du Bois's bitterness. Specifically Weatherford pointed out the lack of human

¹²⁴ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56, 82, 106, 165, 172, and 169.

compassion Du Bois received from whites at the death of his young child.¹²⁷ In this story, which Du Bois relates in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the young black professor is following the funeral procession through Atlanta and overhears whites flippantly remark “Niggers” as he passed.¹²⁸ Weatherford believed in the sacredness of human personality and considered that blacks shared this quality just as equally as whites. Weatherford too had just recently lost his child and knew well the pain Du Bois felt.

Yet even though Weatherford acknowledged African Americans had a “soul” and “a real human personality” and that Jim Crow laws were not “fairly administered,” his book did not call upon whites to treat blacks as full social equals or to push for political changes to end discrimination.¹²⁹ Like almost all southern whites at the time—and Weatherford also claimed this to be true for “the best class of negroes”—he believed there should be no “social intermingling” (which included sexual relations) between African Americans and whites.¹³⁰ In reality, even if he had not found this action objectionable, stating this view at the time would have made the majority of his readers consider him dangerously radical, leading them to discount his entire book. By taking such a stance he might even have been risking some physical harm. Nevertheless, in this study Weatherford implicitly accepted that blacks and whites would live segregated lives. The innovation of his book was in its explicitly calling for the conditions of African Americans to be made equal to those of whites.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹²⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903), 212; and Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 153.

¹²⁹ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 152 and 173.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

Despite the text's pioneering nature, Weatherford still made numerous statements that showed a degree of racism on his part and his acceptance of many generally held assumptions about the "place" of African Americans in southern society. Specifically, Weatherford approved the system of segregated schools, the fact that most blacks should receive industrial training, the idea that this race would always largely make up the laboring class, and he frequently exhibited a somewhat romantic view of slavery.¹³¹ He also wrote several statements that displayed a mixture of progressive ideas with conservative ones. For example, while he correctly recognized the negative role white southern political demagogues played in creating "race antagonism," he also blamed "educated" African American "radicals" and the "Northern enthusiast" for problems in race relations.¹³² He believed that without these three groups, "relations between the races would be cordial enough."¹³³ Among those radical blacks, Weatherford specifically singled out Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter, and William A. Sinclair, and in this process Weatherford revealed his support for Booker T. Washington and the accommodationist style of change.¹³⁴ Weatherford felt that figures like Du Bois were far too critical and pessimistic about the status of race relations and white southerners' attitudes. For all intents and purposes Weatherford's book tried to highlight southern life's optimistic side. It is little surprise that as a white man attempting to appeal to a white southern audience, Weatherford took this approach.

In *Negro Life in the South* Weatherford labored to gain his white audience's trust and maintain their confidence. Among the ways he built his argument and tried to

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 95–96, 105–107, 139, 30, 39, and 62.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10–14

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12–17.

capture their attention was through appealing to the idea of “self-preservation” and the interdependence of whites and blacks.¹³⁵ Weatherford insisted in several places that white students should be interested in the condition of African Americans because blacks’ status essentially affected their own lives. To make this point Weatherford wrote that “our health, our intellectual advancement, and our moral lives are hedged about and often limited by the disease, the ignorance, and the immorality of another race”¹³⁶ Weatherford also used southern tradition, including the ubiquitous reference so commonly made in this period to the revered figures of Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, as he entreated his readers to take up concern for blacks. At one point he asserted

It is because we are born in a section immortalized by such spirits as Lee and Jackson, who gave their lives for its welfare, that we, in this hour of our Southland’s greatest need, will not prove traitors, but will, with the hearts of true sons, bring to its aid the largest knowledge, the sanest judgment, the clearest thought which loyal sons can bring.¹³⁷

In Weatherford’s way of thinking, courage—as best exemplified by Lee and Jackson’s defense of the South in the Civil War—remained one of this region’s finest traditions. Weatherford hoped that the current generation of white southern college men would now have similar fortitude to face the problem of race and do something about it.

Weatherford also made his argument by appealing to the protection of white womanhood. Here his approach was heavily influenced by his Victorian assumptions (a view that actually pervaded the entire text) about respectability and the gender roles of white men and women. Indeed, at several points when he referred to white women he

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25. See also p. 162 for another reference to Lee and Jackson.

wrote “our women.”¹³⁸ Thus his progressive stance on race for the time was mixed with a gendered view of southern society. On this same issue Weatherford also added, “If we expect the black man to respect our women—and he must—then we must force our white men to keep hands off the negro girl—whether she be pure or impure.”¹³⁹ Here and in other places Weatherford is quite bold to acknowledge that white men often assaulted black women.¹⁴⁰ On this subject he wrote,

There has been no small talk about social equality. I do not believe in social intermingling, nor do the best class of negroes. But where a white man uses his larger power and influence to force a negro girl to give up her purity, there is no question of social equality involved; the man is so infinitely below the level of the girl that he does not deserve to be mentioned in the same breath.¹⁴¹

While the first two sentences of this quote were fairly typical for a white southerner to make, the remaining statements were a rarity in 1910.

One additional comment needs to be made regarding Weatherford’s discussion of black women. When Weatherford referred to white females he called them “women,” whereas when he wrote about their African American counterparts he always used the term “girl.” Racism—perhaps unconscious—was involved in Weatherford’s terminology. Specifically he did not consider black women to be on the same status level with white women. To refer to a black woman as “girl” would have fit with the common use at this time of the expression “boy” that whites often applied to black males even of mature age. Even though Weatherford does not fall into this habit for black men, the fact that he does for African American women reveals a mixture of sexism and racism on his

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 166–168.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

part. In the South, African American women were confronted by this double blow of discrimination in this era.

While Weatherford never expressed fear about how blacks would react to his book, he clearly did worry about the way white southerners would receive it. Indeed, even as he was writing the text a few of his fellow YMCA secretaries advised him against taking up the issue, one insisting ““Look here, don’t go and play the fool. What do you want to throw your influence away for and begin to dabble in the Negro question?””¹⁴² Once he finished the manuscript draft, he still remained hesitant about making the study public. This was in the summer of 1910, and Weatherford decided to delay its publication before trying out the ideas on the YMCA Southern Student Conference being held at Montreat, North Carolina.¹⁴³ To his surprise the seminar presenting this book’s ideas proved to have good attendance and participation, and afterwards Weatherford received invitations to visit colleges “to present this new and evidently, to them, most interesting subject.”¹⁴⁴ The text went to press later that year, and by 1916 Weatherford reported that roughly 30,000 copies had been sold and studied by southern college students, male and female and black and white.¹⁴⁵ Some of these readers would remember its impact years later, as was the case with the North Carolina State College YMCA president who recalled in 1943 that he had “got a lot out of the study of this book at the time.”¹⁴⁶ Another white man, Mason Crum—who became a Duke University

¹⁴² W. D. Weatherford, “The Cross in World Reconstruction,” *Blue Ridge Voice*, June 1922, p. 9.

¹⁴³ Weatherford, “The Colored Young Men’s Christian Association,” p. 19, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20; and Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” p. 26, Kautz Family YMCA Archives

¹⁴⁶ George R. Ross to W. D. Weatherford, October 28, 1943, folder 3785, Weatherford Papers. Ross also recollected that Wake Forest College president William Louis Poteat had taught this book at that college

professor of Biblical literature and spent his own life working to improve race relations—credited Weatherford’s book as what “had first awakened [him] to the plight of the Negro because of slavery.”¹⁴⁷ Overall, in spite of the many problematic aspects of *Negro Life in the South*, this study did at least begin the process of pointing white southerners in the right direction.

Not surprisingly some of Weatherford’s audience found his book less than satisfactory. According to Weatherford a professor at Clemson College in South Carolina originally agreed to lead a study course on it, presumably for a YMCA college group, but after reading it declared he could not because the author “was surely paid by the Rockefellers.”¹⁴⁸ The insinuation made here referred to the Rockefeller family’s philanthropy work in southern race relations—primarily by John D. Rockefeller Sr. at this time. Many whites in the South found such efforts intrusive and meddling, threatening their conception of southern tradition. Therefore this Clemson professor was basically voicing his view that the book was too liberal for him, since he equated the Rockefellers’ programs with racial liberalism.

Negro Life in the South also received some criticism from African Americans. In a 1924 *Journal of Negro History* article examining YMCA activities among blacks, one of the participants in the original 1908 Atlanta conference leveled a critique of the study. Jesse Moorland noted that while all the gathering’s members had helped “outline” the project, Weatherford had “developed the book in his own way and had it published

among its student YMCA. See also Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 91.

¹⁴⁷ Clare Taylor, “Mason Crum: Life Devoted to Bettering Race Relations,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 7, 1969, newspaper clipping in folder 3678b, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁸ Weatherford, “History of the Student Young Men’s Christian Association in the South,” p. 26, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; and Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [17] Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

without submitting the manuscript to the committee,” adding, “The book, therefore, contains some matter which otherwise would have been eliminated.”¹⁴⁹ Weatherford never revealed why he took this step, but it is likely his busy schedule and his domineering personality, as well as some trepidation regarding how black committee members might react, all contributed to this decision. Weatherford wrote with the purpose of bringing results, and he was not someone with whom it was always easy to work. Thus it seems consistent with his hard-driving style for him to have pressed on to finish the project, rather than slowing the publication to allow the other conference participants time to review it. After the enthusiasm he received for the study at the 1910 Southern Student Conference, getting the product out—rather than waiting to debate over what he probably considered to be “minor” details—was his first priority.

Perhaps one further issue Moorland and the other African Americans from that conference found troubling in *Negro Life in the South* was that Weatherford had created a text primarily for southern white male students. Weatherford had clearly made this group his intended audience and had even dedicated the book in the following terms: “TO THE COLLEGE MEN OF THE SOUTH, IN WHOSE TOLERANT SPIRIT AND UNSELFISH INTEREST LIES THE HOPE OF THE NEGRO RACE.”¹⁵⁰ Since Moorland and another black YMCA secretary had been on the committee, it is fair to assume they probably wanted a book that could also be used among African American college students as well. Yet Weatherford could not remove himself from the mindset that whites had to do something *for* blacks, rather than *with* them. His closest contact

¹⁴⁹ Jesse Edward Moorland, “The Young Men’s Christian Association Among Negroes,” *Journal of Negro History* 9 (April, 1924), 136.

¹⁵⁰ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, [iii].

was with white students, and he worked from the paternalistic perspective that they were the ones who would lead the change.

Despite all the book's shortcomings, it does appear that the study helped launch a new interest in the issue of race within the YMCA. Even Moorland in his 1924 critique recognized the text's widespread use in white southern colleges, adding "This effort helped to make possible the interracial program of today."¹⁵¹ According to Weatherford, after reading *Negro Life in the South* white college students at the University of South Carolina, University of North Carolina, and University of Alabama and other schools initiated specific projects for African Americans, particularly providing black youth and workers with meeting places for recreation or lectures. Perhaps more importantly Weatherford reported white students began visiting black colleges at this time, a small but significant step that allowed the former to meet educated African Americans and also created the opportunity for each to "know something of what the other group thought."¹⁵² Contributing heavily to the larger impact this book made was the support Cleveland H. Dodge, a wealthy and influential industrialist and chairman of the student subcommittee of the YMCA's International Committee, provided after reading it.¹⁵³ Because of his enthusiasm for the study and its subject, Dodge helped establish the Race Relationship Fund within the YMCA, providing \$10,000 for a period of five years for various activities.¹⁵⁴ This money led to the hiring of Arcadius McSwain (A. M.) Trawick of Nashville, Tennessee (Weatherford's brother-in-law through his deceased wife) to do race-related work, presumably among white students, and also to the addition of

¹⁵¹ Moorland, "YMCA Among Negroes," 136.

¹⁵² Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association," p. 23, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ Moorland, "YMCA Among Negroes," 136.

Channing H. Tobias to the YMCA staff for similar duties among blacks.¹⁵⁵ Tobias would go on to become a key figure in the YMCA, later heading up its Colored Men's Department and after leaving the Y, serving as the chair of the Phelps Stokes Fund (a northern philanthropic organization that financed black education).¹⁵⁶ Dodge's donation also made it possible for Weatherford to travel with Jackson Davis (Rural Supervisor of Negro Schools in Virginia and later member of the General Education Board), to see and photograph African American living conditions in the South. In turn, Weatherford made these pictures into slides and presented this material to white student groups in his YMCA travels.

In addition to these other initiatives, the Race Relationship Fund provided financial support for the first region-wide student conference for African Americans in the South.¹⁵⁷ This initial gathering, styled after those at Northfield and Lake Geneva, took place in 1912 in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. Bringing together representatives from twenty-eight African American colleges, a number of white YMCA leaders also attended, among them A. M. Trawick and Weatherford. Kings Mountain would remain the annual meeting place for African American college YMCA groups for more than twenty years.

¹⁵⁵ Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association," p. 21–23, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. Money from this fund also likely supported a conference in 1914 for African American Christian students in which Weatherford, Trawick, and Tobias all participated. See A. M. Trawick, ed., *The New Voice in Race Adjustments: Addresses and Reports Presented at the Negro Christian Student Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, May 14–18, 1914* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1914).

¹⁵⁶ W. D. Weatherford, compiled, *Interracial Cooperation: A Study of the Various Agencies Working in the Field of Racial Welfare* ([N.P.]: Interracial Committee of the War Work Council of Y.M.C.A., 1920s [no date]), 13–14.

¹⁵⁷ Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association," p. 24–25, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

Weatherford's first book led to another study on the conditions of African Americans, *Present Forces in Negro Progress*, published just two years later. Indeed, the preface of this new text noted its purpose was to add further information on the subject as a result of student interest displayed in *Negro Life in the South*. Weatherford's 1912 study was similar in tone to the earlier one but showed more depth and was based on a greater amount of research and statistical data. In the end though, Weatherford essentially made the same argument as he had in his first book: white southerners needed to recognize the conditions of African Americans and do something to improve them.

Weatherford continued to make appeals that were progressive for this time. He called for better living and sanitary conditions for black homes and schools, criticized white landlords who exploited their black tenant farmers, pushed for more African American farm demonstration agents, pointed out the need for playgrounds and public parks for blacks, and advocated for nurseries for black servant women's children in the homes of white women.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, as he referred to the circumstances blacks endured, he wrote very forcefully and passionately about whites' responsibilities, noting "We allow practices which no self-respecting community ought to allow, and all these things result in indifference, immorality, physical inability and death for the Negro—and we are his murderers."¹⁵⁹ Weatherford was also sensitive to terminology that described blacks. At one point in the text he admitted his disapproval of the term "old-time dinky" when referring to African Americans during slavery.¹⁶⁰ Weatherford also took the unusual step of having the "N" in "Negro" capitalized in his book (something that had not been done

¹⁵⁸ W. D. Weatherford, *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (New York and London: Association Press, 1912), 74, 121, 122, 101, 111, 125–126, 178, and 69.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

in the previous text), a decision that he intended as a sign of respect for this group.

According to Dykeman, the printer did not originally comply with Weatherford's style in the first page proofs but only corrected this issue after Weatherford sent it back with the instructions "to reset the whole book *the way it had been written*."¹⁶¹

Another slight change from the first book was the broadening of the intended audience. While Weatherford still expected his basic readers to be white southerners, he also recognized (probably because *Negro Life in the South* had been studied in some African American YMCA college groups) that a few black students might read these pages, thus at one point he acknowledged them.¹⁶² The book also reached beyond college students. Due to Weatherford's emphasis on black farmers and his chapter on this subject, Weatherford secured the support of the United States Secretary of Agriculture and the financial aid of Chicago philanthropist and Sears-Roebuck leader, Julius Rosenwald, to send the book out to all of the southern farm demonstration agents.¹⁶³ Thus, this new text built on the earlier one, making a few shifts in a more progressive direction.

Yet the book was not without its faults, and they were numerous. Weatherford still accepted Jim Crow and was unable to free himself from a number of racial prejudices. His own racism was particularly exhibited in the section where he generalized about the "mental and moral traits of the Negro."¹⁶⁴ Weatherford, based on a

¹⁶¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 78. Emphasis in original. While "Negro" is capitalized throughout most of the text there are still several instances where it is lowercased. It is unclear why this is inconsistent. For examples, see pp. 32, 111, and 121.

¹⁶² Weatherford, *Present Forces*, 32.

¹⁶³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 79–80.

¹⁶⁴ Weatherford, *Present Forces*, 16. Historian Bruce Clayton's dissertation also made this point in the section where he discussed Weatherford's early race relations career and analyzed *Present Forces in Negro Progress*. See Bruce Clayton, "Southern Critics of the New South, 1890–1914" (Ph. D. diss., Duke

loose application of Darwinian theories, believed that these behavioral characteristics were the result of their African heritage and environment, and were also hereditary.¹⁶⁵ Just prior to listing what he considered these typical African American traits to be, he wrote:

It is to be noted, of course, that the white man possesses many or all of these characteristics in greater or less degree, for whites and blacks started with the same general nature; but the environment of Africa has accentuated certain characteristics for the negro, and the environment of Europe has accentuated others for the whites.¹⁶⁶

Weatherford went on to claim that blacks lacked “self-control”; tended to be lazy and indulge in sex, food, alcohol, and tobacco; were superstitious and “cruel” to animals and one another; often were “vain” and “conceited”; and had a “lack of initiative.”¹⁶⁷ These were their negative attributes, but he also listed what he termed “Strong Points in Negro Character.”¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, in the process of pointing out this group’s sense of loyalty, “gratitude,” “generosity,” kindness, humor, religiosity, and talent with music, he patronized them to some extent.¹⁶⁹ For example, as he mentioned African Americans’ penchant for humor he wrote “There is no better amusement than to sit down near a railroad station where a dozen negroes are congregated and, unobserved, listen to their sallies. It is all so quaint, so naïve, and withal so full of genuine humor that it furnishes

University, 1966), 272–274. This study was later published as Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal: Intolerance and Intellectual Leadership in the South, 1890–1914* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972). However, in this form the section on Weatherford was omitted. In the midst of Clayton’s research for his dissertation he wrote Weatherford asking for his cooperation in this project. In this same letter Clayton commented that he had just finished reading Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely’s biography of Will Alexander, *Seeds of Southern Change* (1962). Clayton also noted his interest in possibly pursuing a biography of Weatherford as a future project adding, “I have a feeling that your contribution to southern race relations should be as well know[n] as Will Alexander’s.” See Bruce L. Clayton to W. D. Weatherford, February 22, 1965, folder 3878, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶⁵ Weatherford, *Present Forces*, 13–16.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19–24.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 26–31.

real recreation.”¹⁷⁰ While Weatherford intended this statement to be a complement, his words diminished rather than raised respect for blacks. It was comments like these that probably led historian Carter Woodson, a leading figure in the founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (1915), in 1932 to label *Present Forces in Negro Progress* as a “scandalous and libelous work.”¹⁷¹ Overall, despite what appears to be sincere and real concern for African American people, Weatherford could not step very far out of his time and place.

Weatherford’s racism resulted from his basic assumptions regarding how one’s environment influenced a person. Progressives, of which Weatherford generally qualified, emphasized that environmental factors were the key determinant in understanding people’s actions and characteristics. Thus, change these conditions and change the person. Racists considered that there was something inherent to one’s race (that could not be altered) that explained people’s behavior. At this time Weatherford’s perspective was basically a mixture of these two views since he considered environment to be a critical factor in forming character, yet he also thought that these behavioral traits could be passed biologically. For example, Weatherford stated that he believed the current status of African Americans was “not because of inherent racial disability, but because [their] environment ha[d] been unfavorable.”¹⁷² However, at another point he

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷¹ Carter G. Woodson, “A Rejoinder to Dr. Tobias,” July 30, 1932, *Chicago Defender*. Woodson also noted in this newspaper article that Channing Tobias and Jesse Moorland had “co-operated with” Weatherford and “approved” the publication of this book. Yet these men later came to Woodson asking him to write a book “in answer to Weatherford.” Woodson went on to write “The Case of the Negro” but according to its author it was never published because Tobias and Moorland thought he was “rather hard on preachers of a certain type.” For more information on Woodson see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 151–157.

¹⁷² Weatherford, *Present Forces*, 75.

insisted that blacks had begun to “acquire” more self-control over the past centuries since they had been in America, the point being that he thought this behavior was somehow passed genetically.¹⁷³ Overall, it seems that Weatherford believed races could change over time, a fairly progressive stance in the early-twentieth-century South. Yet he also held the view that environmental factors, which were crucial to determining behavioral characteristics, still maintained an influence that extended over multiple generations.

To provide white college students with more information on African American culture Weatherford also took one additional step along educational lines. He gathered together what he termed a “library” on this subject (in actuality, this ranged from seven to ten books) and “got rights to publish” them.¹⁷⁴ These texts were written by whites and blacks and ranged from “scholarly” studies and advocacy pieces on race to collections of African American literature and autobiography. Weatherford’s plan was that this set could be bought, presumably by white students, providing them with “knowledge of the Negro.”¹⁷⁵ According to Weatherford this project began shortly after the publication of *Negro Life in the South* and among the texts included were the following: Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* (1901); Lily Hardy Hammond’s *In Black and White* (1914); one of Joel Chandler Harris’s “Uncle Remus” books, and verse by the African

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷⁴ Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [17], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Weatherford probably used the YMCA’s publishing arm, the “Association Press,” to put out these books. This YMCA department began in 1907 and Weatherford published numerous of his own works through this organization. For more information of the Association Press see Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 482–483.

¹⁷⁵ Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [17], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. In 1912 this set apparently sold for \$5. For price see Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and “Race Relationships in the South,” advertisement in Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, revised edition, 1915, p. [182].

American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. In 1915, this compilation included Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and *The Story of the Negro* (1909), Weatherford's *Negro Life in the South*, Edgar Gardner Murphy's *The Basis of Ascendancy* (1909), Gilbert Thomas Stephenson's *Race Distinctions in American Law* (1910), and Albert Bushnell Hart's *The Southern South* (1910).¹⁷⁶ In general, this project continued Weatherford's basic approach to improving race relations at the time. He was trying to provide southern white college students with information about blacks, a subject on which they were basically ignorant. In some ways Weatherford's method was an understandable strategy for that time; yet, in future years Weatherford would again return to this approach when it was no longer appropriate.

Weatherford's race relations activities in this period also included involvement in a newly formed Progressive organization, the Southern Sociological Congress. Gathering together men and women, white and black, from a variety of religious and social service-oriented backgrounds, this group began meeting in 1912 and continued until 1920.¹⁷⁷ The organization, which usually met between three and five days each year, began in its first three conventions with speeches and discussions on a variety of issues, including child labor and welfare, public health, the justice system, race relations and current conditions of African Americans, education, family problems, and church and social services. As one historian has noted, participants in this group met "to scrutinize, publicize, and exorcise the ills and afflictions of the South."¹⁷⁸ The inaugural meeting

¹⁷⁶ "Race Relationships in the South," advertisement.

¹⁷⁷ John Joel Culley, "Muted Trumpets: Four Efforts to Better Southern Race Relations, 1900-1919" (Ph. D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967), 114; and E. Charles Chatfield, "The Southern Sociological Congress: Organization of Uplift," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 19 (December 1960): 328-347.

¹⁷⁸ Culley, "Muted Trumpets," 141.

took place in Nashville, Tennessee, with over seven hundred participants, and in subsequent years the congress held conferences in Atlanta (1913), Memphis (1914), Houston (1915), New Orleans (1916), Blue Ridge (1917), Birmingham (1918), Knoxville (1919), and Washington, D.C. (1920).¹⁷⁹ After the Memphis gathering the congress narrowed its program, focusing on single issues like public health in its 1915 Houston meeting and citizenship in 1919 in Knoxville.¹⁸⁰ Eventually, the organization moved its headquarters from Nashville to Washington, D.C. and became “less oriented to social welfare work in the South and more involved in national movements” as a result of developments surrounding World War I.¹⁸¹ In 1920 it became “The Southern Co-Operative League for Education and Social Service” and by 1925 “The Home Betterment League.”¹⁸² Consequently over time racial issues became less prominent in its agenda. After 1919 most southerners interested in that subject shifted their attention to a new interracial venture, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC).

Yet the Southern Sociological Congress’s early attention to race relations was noteworthy. Over the course of its existence, fifty-two speeches were given and published on the subject, with fourteen of these provided by black men and women.¹⁸³ The proceedings and addresses of several of the overall gatherings were published in book form for wider circulation, and in 1914 the NAACP’s *The Crisis* even reported favorably about the congress’s activities. Commenting specifically on a collection of race-related speeches from the 1913 congress published as *The Human Way* (1913), *The*

¹⁷⁹ See Chatfield, “Southern Sociological Congress;” Hall, *William Louis Poteat*, 81–82; and John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 45–46.

¹⁸⁰ Chatfield, “Southern Sociological Congress,” 338 and 344–345.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁸³ Culley, “Muted Trumpets,” 141–142.

Crisis noted this book “is in its way epochmaking; its message is tremendous. Here are men and young men, Southern whites, saying precisely what *The Crisis* has been trying to say.”¹⁸⁴ The congress also spawned other race-related organizations and gatherings. Indeed, the initial meeting in Nashville led James Hardy Dillard (a director of the Anna T. Jeanes and the Slater foundations, which both provided financial support for African American education) to create the Commission of Southern Universities on the Race Question.¹⁸⁵ In 1917 another extension of the Southern Sociological Congress was the Law and Order Conference on lynching held at Blue Ridge.¹⁸⁶ This council, which apparently only white men and women attended, examined numerous justice questions but particularly focused on eradicating mob violence. Race, in short, proved to be a fundamental element of the congress’s work between 1912 and 1917.

From its inception Weatherford was active in the Southern Sociological Congress. For the 1912 Nashville meeting Weatherford served on a committee on “Negro Problems” and also spoke, his topic being “The Negro and the New South.”¹⁸⁷ Surveying the history of the South since the end of the Civil War, Weatherford insisted that the region was making progress both economically and intellectually, but he pointed out “The test of an individual or a nation is not in the realm of possessions nor in the realm of knowledge, but in the realm of relationships. It is not what we have or what we know

¹⁸⁴ “Some Frank Facts,” *The Crisis* 8 (May 1914), 41.

¹⁸⁵ Chatfield, “Southern Sociological Congress,” 336.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 346–347; and Willis Duke Weatherford, ed., *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Held at Blue Ridge, N.C., August 4th, 5th, and 6th, Nineteen Hundred and Seventeen* (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917).

¹⁸⁷ James E. McCulloch, ed., *The Call of the New South: Addresses Delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress, Nashville, Tennessee, May 7 to 10, 1912* (Nashville: Brandau-Craig-Dickerson Co., 1912), 220–225, and 361.

that makes us great, but our attitude toward humanity.”¹⁸⁸ Working from his long-held premise that all persons had value and were sacred, Weatherford encouraged the members to “think of the negro as a human being.”¹⁸⁹ Basically Weatherford was offering a speech to encourage a different perspective on African Americans—a chance to allow these men and women to have lives wherein they could pursue their hopes and dreams, just like white citizens could.

Weatherford’s participation at the 1913 and 1914 Southern Sociological Congress meetings varied little from his approach at the first meeting. He gave formal addresses at both and continued to serve on committees regarding racial issues. His addresses, “How to Enlist the Welfare Agencies of the South for Improvement of Conditions Among the Negroes” (1913) and “Religion the Common Basis of Co-operation” (1914), were fairly self-explanatory.¹⁹⁰ In the first Weatherford, however, took a more passionate tone than usual. As he noted which institutions in the South were working to aid African Americans, he called for greater attention. He insisted that these agencies not just focus on whites, asserting, “remember that we are not working for 20,547,420 whites, but for twenty million whites plus 8,749,427 negroes. We must not forget that we have a population of 29,296,847 and that we have no right to omit a single one of these when we are laying our plans for social betterment.”¹⁹¹ The following year in Memphis

¹⁸⁸ Weatherford, W. D., “The Negro and the New South,” in McCulloch, ed., *The Call of the New South*, 221.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 225 and 223.

¹⁹⁰ See James E. McCulloch, ed., *The South Mobilizing for Social Service: Addresses Delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress, Atlanta, Georgia, April 25–29, 1913* (Nashville: Brandau-Craig-Dickerson Co., 1913), 350–360; James E. McCulloch, ed., *The Human Way: Addresses on Race Problems at the Southern Sociological Congress, Atlanta, 1913* (Nashville: Brandau-Craig-Dickerson Co., 1913), 8–18; and James E. McCulloch, ed., *Battling for Social Betterment: Southern Sociological Congress, Memphis, Tennessee, May 6–10, 1914* (Nashville: Benson Printing Co., 1914), 178–188.

¹⁹¹ McCulloch, ed., *The Human Way*, 17.

Weatherford concentrated on how religion could serve as a foundation for improving race relations. He wrote:

I know not how much emphasis the remainder of the country may put on the bearing of religion in the bettering of social conditions, but this I do know: that here in the South, where our great social problem is a problem of attitude toward persons of a different race, a different color, and a different heritage, there is only one thing that is far reaching enough, only one thing profound enough, only one thing dynamic enough to make us all into a common humanity, and that is religion. No superficial humanitarian or philanthropy will do this.¹⁹²

Weatherford believed it was crucial to change how whites viewed blacks and then alter conditions to allow for equal treatment. Weatherford did not consider legal measures to be the best route to bring about this outcome because there were limits to this approach. He pointed out that “No amount of legislation can ever make us value the individual; it can only prevent or deter us from harming that individual. Law can never change our essential attitude toward humanity.”¹⁹³ For Weatherford only the church could bring about this outcome. Overall, Weatherford’s speeches before the Southern Sociological Congress concentrated primarily on changing conditions for African Americans and encouraging whites to adjust their attitudes toward this group, treating them as human beings. Weatherford was moving in the right direction, but his hesitancy to call for political changes limited his impact. While changing attitudes is important, he simply did not understand that on occasion people must be compelled to treat other groups fairly. Appealing to reason and people’s guilty conscience would not always suffice to affect necessary change.

Weatherford’s actions at the 1914 gathering in Memphis indicate he was willing to do more than just talk about what he considered to be equal treatment. In that year the

¹⁹² McCulloch, ed., *Battling for Social Betterment*, 187–188.

¹⁹³ McCulloch, ed., *The Human Way*, 9.

Southern Sociological Congress (May 6–10) overlapped two days with a gathering of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (May 8–15), and the responsibility for the evening meetings of these two nights rotated between the organizations.¹⁹⁴ Prior to May 8 African Americans members of the congress had been provided seating on the main floor of the Orpheum theater (the meeting place) rather than in the balcony, but they were likely still seated in a segregated section. Placing blacks upstairs was a common custom in the Jim Crow South, and allowing African Americans separate space on the ground level was intended as a gesture of good will. Yet it is important to recognize that the congress was still not encouraging integrated seating between whites and blacks on the floor level but rather only what whites considered “equal” access. On the next evening, when the National Conference of Charities and Corrections was in charge of the session, they refused to allow even this concession, relegating African American members of the congress to the balcony. This group did not accept this assignment and promptly walked out. When the Southern Sociological Congress took control of the following night’s meeting, Weatherford led an effort to have blacks once again allowed in the theater’s lower section. However, by this point the building’s owner refused. Committed to the initial arrangement, Weatherford worked out a new venue at the First Methodist Church for the gathering, this one presumably allowing for the earlier “near-equal” seating.¹⁹⁵ Weatherford would go on to credit this event with being pivotal in his securing respect from these black participants, particularly that of Robert Russa Moton,

¹⁹⁴ Culley, “Muted Trumpets,” 126–129.

¹⁹⁵ Culley, “Muted Trumpets,” 127 and 128. For other information on this event see Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 75–77; and Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [11–13], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Dykeman’s version, presumably based on Weatherford’s statements in “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” gives the impression that blacks were not segregated at all, but Culley’s explanation seems more plausible.

who was then a leader of Hampton Institute and later Booker T. Washington's successor at Tuskegee Institute.

This incident, as well as Weatherford's speeches at the Southern Sociological Congress, reveals that while Weatherford wanted blacks to have equal conditions with whites, the races should still remain segregated. In Weatherford's mind there could be equality even within Jim Crow. In the Memphis seating episode Weatherford did not want blacks to be required to sit in the theater's balcony because it was not the same arrangement accorded to whites. Furthermore, this practice humiliated these African Americans. Weatherford wanted their respect and believed they deserved his own and that of the other congress members. However, for him this did not mean blacks and white should be dispersed throughout the downstairs at random but that there should be designated sections for both racial groups where they would have "equal" status on the same floor.

Weatherford felt similarly about the relationship between blacks and whites in southern society as a whole. Weatherford was essentially a proponent of "dual civilizations," the idea that blacks and whites should have distinct cultures while, as he described it, "living side by side, each helping the other and neither begrudging the other any real achievement."¹⁹⁶ Basically each race would maintain their own schools, churches, businesses, and most important of all, relationships, while existing peacefully together in the same region. This idea for "dual" or "parallel civilizations" was originally

¹⁹⁶ W. D. Weatherford, *The Negro from Africa to America* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1924), 431.

set forth by another white southern liberal of this period, Edgar Gardner Murphy.¹⁹⁷

Murphy, born in 1869, was an Episcopalian clergyman and exemplar of the southern Progressive movement. His plan for separate white and African American “civilizations” also called for allowing each race to have “equal” opportunities to grow and develop on their own. For those white southerners who wanted to improve race relations without challenging the segregated way of southern life, this was about the best plan they could muster.

Weatherford’s race relations work in the late 1900s and early 1910s began bringing him notoriety in this period in the YMCA, both inside and outside of the South. In 1914 he made an extensive tour abroad for over seven months, traveling from Jerusalem to Asia.¹⁹⁸ In China Weatherford gained access and spoke at the Royal Customs College under the pretense that he “was an authority on race.”¹⁹⁹ He also lectured on this subject, as well as student religious life, in Japan and Korea. Overall, Weatherford received an enthusiastic response to his racial talks, apparently a reaction he did not expect. Indeed, Weatherford wrote back to some of his southern friends at the

¹⁹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 431; Willis D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson, *Race Relations: Adjustment of Whites and Negroes in the United States* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1934), 529–530; and Culley, “Muted Trumpets,” 131, 136, 228, and 232. For more information on Murphy see Clayton, *The Savage Ideal*, 12 and 195–204; and Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 12, 14–15, 22, and 93.

¹⁹⁸ Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [18–19], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Weatherford had fairly extensive experience abroad even before this 1914 trip. In 1912 he helped lead a group of ten YMCA secretaries on a two month trip to Jerusalem, Lebanon, Egypt, Italy, France, and England. See E. P. Hall to W. D. Weatherford, January 14, 1969, folder 3914, Weatherford Papers; Willis D. Weatherford, “The Training Program of the Southern Y.M.C.A.’s,” p. 5, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; and Ada Trawick Culbreth, “The Culbreth Family Story,” p. 50, Culbreth family papers, Waynesville, North Carolina. Weatherford also noted in his 1914 speech before the Southern Sociological Congress that “some two years ago” he had toured seventeen different countries including Turkey and parts of southeast Europe, “in many of which racial problems were most acute.” Whether this trip was the earlier 1912 trip with the YMCA secretaries or another visit is unclear. See McCulloch, ed., *Battling for Social Betterment*, 186. In 1913 Weatherford also was out of the country because he missed his father’s funeral. See “Death of S. L. Weatherford,” January 18, 1913, *Daily Herald*, Weatherford family vertical file.

¹⁹⁹ Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [18], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

time that he “was riding to glory on the backs of colored men.”²⁰⁰ Weatherford’s words here seem slightly patronizing and also suggest that he was surprised that addressing this issue would advance him within the YMCA. For Weatherford and his white friends, it was ironic that his taking up the concern of a people held in such low esteem in the South would actually prove professionally beneficial. Whites in the South who questioned this aspect of southern tradition usually did just the opposite for their careers.

Perhaps due to the perceived success of this 1914 trip and Weatherford’s other foreign travels, John R. Mott offered him the opportunity to lead the YMCA’s secretarial training program in China and teach religion.²⁰¹ But Weatherford declined this post, choosing to remain as the southern secretary because he felt his “task was to do something for the South.”²⁰² Weatherford would maintain this sentiment in future years when other attractive job options tried to lure him out of his native region.

After Weatherford returned to the United States he continued and extended his race relations work through the 1910s beyond the YMCA. He maintained his involvement in the Southern Sociological Congress until it eventually dissolved and also made the discussion of racial issues a significant part of his Blue Ridge conference center. Furthermore, he became a critical figure in the creation of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) in 1919, the first major interracial organization in the South.²⁰³ While the Southern Sociological Congress had included black members and

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. [19].

²⁰¹ Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Exact date not given.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ See Julia Anne McDonough, “Men and Women of Good Will: History of the Commission of Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919–1954” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1993); Charles Kirk Pilkington, “The Trials of Brotherhood: The Founding of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 69 (Spring 1985): 55–80; Edward Flud Barrows, “The

had focused heavily on the issue of race relations in its early years, this emphasis on race lessened over time. Moreover, the congress's activities were heavily centered on its annual meeting; it was not an active and on-going organization with a strong grass roots component. As the congress lessened in importance, a new movement was needed. In reality the conditions of the late 1910s necessitated something immediate.

Indeed, the driving impetus for the CIC was the end of World War I and fears of escalating racial tensions. In this conflict over 400,000 African American soldiers had fought in the "war to save democracy." Yet these returning black servicemen, particularly those from the South, did not enjoy full access to these freedoms in their own country, and there was now fear that they would no longer be satisfied with the denial of these rights. Moreover, some racist whites were uncomfortable with what they believed to be the social acceptance French white women had extended to black troops stationed in that country, presuming this experience might disrupt traditional segregated social relations in the South.²⁰⁴ In short, some whites believed blacks needed to be reminded of their "place." Concerned citizens, black and white, worried that postwar conditions would lead to violence. Indeed, these fears turned out to be warranted since over twenty-five race riots took place in 1919, a period the African American poet James Weldon Johnson termed as "The Red Summer."²⁰⁵ The CIC began in the early months of 1919 with the purpose of preventing some of this violence and helping to aid in the

Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1919–1944: A Case Study in the History of Interracial Movement in the South" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1954); and Ann Wells Ellis, "The Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1919–1944: Its Activities and Results" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 1975). For an informative study about the life and work of early CIC director Will Alexander, see Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1962).

²⁰⁴ Ellis, "Commission on Interracial Cooperation," 7.

²⁰⁵ Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 152.

readjustment of black soldiers back into America.²⁰⁶ Weatherford was among the founding members of this group.²⁰⁷

In actuality, both the YMCA and Weatherford played important roles in the CIC's development. Weatherford's connection to the formation of the CIC goes back to his involvement in training YMCA secretaries for work with soldiers during WWI.²⁰⁸ In the midst of this world conflict, the YMCA's War Work Council had been formed to direct and fund the activities of Association leadership in American and foreign military camps.²⁰⁹ At these sites Y representatives provided similar religious, educational, and recreational opportunities as found in local city branches. During these years, amid Weatherford's other responsibilities as a YMCA secretary, Weatherford operated an institute at Blue Ridge that prepared 1,200 men to serve in these positions.²¹⁰ Because of his role in southern race relations and his connections throughout the South, Weatherford undoubtedly was aware of the growing concerns of racial unrest.²¹¹ As a result, on the day of the armistice in 1918 Weatherford, "fearing ill feeling and possible race riots," put

²⁰⁶ See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 62; Sosna, *Silent South*, 22; Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 178; and Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), II, 842–50.

²⁰⁷ See Dykeman and Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change*, 58–59; and Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 47. See also W. D. Weatherford, "John Joseph Eagan," p. 10–11, Folder 3726, Weatherford Papers; Paul N. Probst to W. D. Weatherford, June 20, 1933, Folder 3645; and W.D. Weatherford to Paul N. Probst, July 13, 1933, Folder 3645. Probst wrote to Weatherford inquiring about his early involvement in the formation of the CIC because Probst was completing a history of this organization for his Bachelor of Divinity degree at Emory University at the time.

²⁰⁸ Weatherford, "The Training Program of the Southern Y.M.C.A.'s," p. 18, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; W. D. Weatherford to Judson G. Rosebush, December 31, 1932, folder 1531, Weatherford Papers; Hopkins, *History of YMCA*, 577; and Weatherford, *Negro from Africa to America*, 450–451.

²⁰⁹ Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association," p. 31–33, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

²¹⁰ Weatherford, "The Training Program of the Southern Y.M.C.A.'s," p. 18, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

²¹¹ Weatherford later commented "that Negroes who had been in white homes in France and Germany would not be willing to live as they had before the war and should not." See unpaginated notebook titled "Notes by WD Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

together a plan to extend his training program.²¹² This time he wanted “to assemble at Blue Ridge white and Colored leaders from every community in the South to consider ways and means, and above all the proper spirit of dealing with the returned soldier.”²¹³ Weatherford secured \$75,000 from the War Work Council to carry on this agenda, and while it “was contemplated” that this group would meet in integrated fashion at Blue Ridge, this part of the plan later changed.²¹⁴ Eventually, Weatherford led the white group (a total of 902) at Blue Ridge and Will W. Alexander, then the Personnel Director of the Southeastern Division of War Work of the YMCA, supervised a similar program in Atlanta for 509 African American leaders.²¹⁵ According to Weatherford these men—mainly lawyers, educators, businessmen, and clergy—soon recognized the “problems were even bigger and more pressing” than expected and that “further steps” should be taken.²¹⁶ This led to a meeting in New York, and soon thereafter one in Atlanta in March 1919, in which Weatherford was present and the CIC was formed.²¹⁷ Funds from the War Work Council provided financial backing for the organization in its first years.

²¹² Weatherford, “The Colored Young Men’s Christian Association,” p. 33–34, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35–36.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²¹⁷ Ellis, “Commission on Interracial Cooperation,” 11–12; and Weatherford, “The Colored Young Men’s Christian Association,” p. 35, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. According to Weatherford the following people met at the Georgian Terrace Hotel in Atlanta for the founding meeting: John J. Eagan (businessman and YMCA supporter), M. Ashby Jones (pastor of Atlanta’s Ponce de Leon Baptist Church), Plato Durham (Emory professor); Robert Russa Moton (Tuskegee Institute principal) as well as YMCA secretaries Richard H. King, S. A. Ackley, Will W. Alexander, and Wallace Buttrick. In her excellent dissertation, Ann Wells Ellis contends that while Weatherford and the YMCA played a prominent part in the CIC’s creation that Moton and Thomas Jesse Jones (Educational Director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund) were the real “motivators in creating and financing the interracial movement.” In December 1918 (following the armistice) President Woodrow Wilson sent Moton and Jones to France to meet and discuss with African American soldiers “what their return home would mean.” Ellis argues that these men were the ones who thought of the idea of creating local interracial committees to address race relations, and that Moton and Jones collaborated with the parallel efforts of the YMCA to start the CIC. See Ellis, “Commission on Interracial Cooperation,” 7–16. Quotes on p. 15 and 7.

The basic program of the CIC was to create interracial committees throughout the South to address specific racial concerns. While the main office would be run out of Atlanta by Will Alexander, most of the real work was intended to take place in local communities, where the “‘best’ white and black men could cooperate in improving interracial relations.”²¹⁸ As CIC educational director, Robert Burns Eleazer, noted, the program was not meant to be a forum for discussing the abstract question of “‘the race problem’” or for the “‘the purpose of dealing with race prejudice’”; rather it was about getting “‘leaders of the two groups together around some concrete situation which need[ed] attention.’”²¹⁹ Critical to this organization’s philosophy was a new principle that had rarely existed in previous race relations groups—whites should work “with the blacks rather than for them.”²²⁰ From the start of the CIC, organizers of the movement intended local committees to work for the following concerns:

- (1) Celebrations for returning soldiers, (2) Improvement in traveling accommodations, both street car and railways, (3) Better school provisions, (4) Better housing, and the improvement of unsanitary conditions of homes and streets, (5) Parks and playgrounds, (6) The development of public opinion among white people which requires higher moral standards for all Negroes, (7) Secure industrial fairness—equal wages for equal work, (8) Justice before the law—this is intended to include the abolition of lynching.²²¹

YMCA secretaries would play an important part in getting these committees set up across the South, essentially serving as the point people in their home areas.²²² In short, the CIC stood for fixing and/or ameliorating individual issues and local concerns and for dealing with problems of segregation rather than challenging that system. This program, as

²¹⁸ Ellis, “Commission on Interracial Cooperation,” 16.

²¹⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 22.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22. Emphasis in original.

²²¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 16.

²²² *Ibid.*, 16–18.

particularly outlined in the organization's initial "concerns," was basically the same Weatherford had called for in *Negro Life in the South* and *Present Forces in Negro Progress*.

In the late 1910s Weatherford was also involved in two other projects along the lines of race relations. Specifically he was leading two institutions, the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training and the newly formed Southern College of the YMCAs (1919). Weatherford essentially created each of these educational ventures, which grew out of his passion for the YMCA, training, religious education, and southern race relations. Subsequent chapters will examine these two organizations in closer detail.

Between 1901 and 1919 the YMCA remained an important force in the South, and Weatherford played a central part in this organization's influence. His most significant role was pushing the Y to present a rational basis for religious belief as well as engaging the social issue of race. This institution along with its gendered counterpart, the YWCA, proved to be critical centers for developing southern liberals of this period. John Egerton in his extensive study of southern race relations of the first half of twentieth century has acknowledged this fact as well, noting:

The YMCA and YWCA were among the first church-related agencies to address social concerns. Many of the Southerners who yearned to do something about race relations in the twentieth century—and almost all of the ones who had strong religious ties—could trace their awakening in some degree to the exposure they got at the Y. Student associations for men and women, black and white, were opened across the South by W. D. Weatherford and others in the first quarter of the century; in the second quarter, these young people became the leaders who moved the associations forward. Among other things, they did away with the

racial barriers that the culture imposed and that paternalistic leaders like Weatherford enforced.²²³

Perhaps Egerton is a little too critical of Weatherford in the period after 1925.

Nevertheless, it is clear in the earlier era that Weatherford was behind a number of the first steps taken to improve southern race relations. In many ways Weatherford pushed the YMCA to the extent that was possible in the South at this time. He did not challenge Jim Crow but rather worked for reform within this system, trying to educate white southerners about the condition of blacks and challenge them to make changes. He did this through his textbooks, YMCA travels, and support and participation in race-related and interracial groups. In short, he had an important impact on the direction the southern YMCA took on race. Yet Weatherford obviously had his limits. His Victorian perspective, his emphasis on the individual aspects of religious faith, and his own racism sometimes diverted and limited his achievements. Still, it is important to recognize Weatherford did not have to take up the issue of race. In the context of the South at this time it was a risk to his personal reputation as well as his professional career. In the early period of Blue Ridge, Weatherford would truly test what remained possible in the South, particularly with visits from an old friend he had made years before at another YMCA student conference.

²²³ Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 426.

Chapter 3—The Limits to Improving Race Relations in the South: The Blue Ridge Assembly, 1912–1952

In late April 1926 George Washington Carver—an African American scientist at the black Tuskegee Institute in Alabama—wrote to John W. Bergthold, student secretary of the National Council YMCA in the South. The scientist thought the secretary would “be interested to know” that he had “received 499 letters from the young men whom [he had] met summer before last at Blue Ridge.”¹ He went on to say, “I hear from all of those who [were] in the cottage where I stopped, that is the Virginia Cottage. Three of these young men have already been to Tuskegee, and four or five have promised to come down this summer.”² Carver had attended the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training in June 1924 to speak and provide a presentation of his work on peanuts.³ While Carver frequently traveled throughout the South presenting his scientific work, this trip was unusual. This time he spoke and stayed at the YMCA conference center that ostensibly served only the whites students of the region.⁴

Carver’s experience at Blue Ridge was significant for what occurred during that visit as well as its aftermath. Having “slept among and dined” with the all-white Virginia YMCA delegates, Carver and these young men had broken the South’s segregated

¹ George Washington Carver to John W. Bergthold, April 21, 1926, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives (microfilm ed.; Tuskegee, AL: Carver Research Foundation, 1975) reel 9, frame 900 (hereinafter cited as Carver Papers with appropriate reel and frame number).

² Carver to Bergthold, April 21, 1926, Carver Papers, reel 9, frame 900.

³ Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 202.

⁴ According to Benjamin Mays’s autobiography, “Blue Ridge was the segregated conference ground for white students” and Kings Mountain, North Carolina was the segregated site for black YMCA students of the Southeast. See Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 126. For more information regarding the locations and programs of other YMCA conference centers, see C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 614–618 and 637–638.

custom.⁵ In the context of the times, this was an extraordinary event. In 1901 President Theodore Roosevelt had invited Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House.⁶ This simple act, which seemed to imply social equality between blacks and whites, “outraged” southerners, eliciting their fury and a debate that lasted for months.⁷ Challenging Jim Crow remained unusual and risky in the coming years. Southern whites who faced up to segregation also experienced a severe backlash in this period. In 1926 (two years after Carver went to Blue Ridge), a prominent white proponent of improved race relations—Will Alexander—dared to voice his support for repealing Jim Crow laws while speaking in Birmingham, Alabama.⁸ Southern newspapers quickly denounced his statements, and Alexander received phone calls threatening his life if he did not leave town. Thus, set within this milieu, the visit and stay of an African American scientist to an all-white southern conference center in 1924 appears remarkable.

Carver’s trip to Blue Ridge was also significant for the lasting relationships that resulted from it. The amount of correspondence from these young white men and their subsequent visits to Tuskegee show that Carver made a profound impact. By 1930, according to one of Carver’s biographers, he had received almost a thousand letters from

⁵ Quote in Robert F. Martin, *Howard Kester and the Struggle for Social Justice in the South, 1904–77* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 26. This action may also have broken the law. Howard Kester’s unpublished “Radical Prophets: A History of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen” also records Carver’s stay with the Lynchburg delegates at Blue Ridge and notes the legal implications of the act. He writes “it should be noted that every Southern state held it to be illegal for Negroes to either room or eat in white hotels or dining rooms. To violate the law was to run the risk of having your license to operate revoked.” See Howard A. Kester, “Radical Prophets: A History of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen,” 1974 (photographic copy in possession of author; original in possession of Nancy Kester Neale, Asheville, NC), 23.

⁶ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 6th ed. (New York and other cities: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1988), 278.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁸ Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1962), 273–275.

his ““dear Blue Ridge boys.’”⁹ Carver’s connection with some of these young men would continue until his death in 1943. The existence of Blue Ridge as a place committed to improving race relations had made this interaction possible. The extent to which the conference center achieved progress on this issue demonstrates the limits of what was possible for a southern institution at this time.

Without a doubt, Blue Ridge was an atypical meeting space in the early-twentieth-century American South. Primarily created to serve as the permanent location for white YMCA and YWCA students of the South, its programs focused on developing Christian character and making its participants aware of their responsibilities as followers of Jesus. Furthermore, it served as a site for a variety of YMCA and YWCA conferences and leadership events. From the center’s inception, W. D. Weatherford, its founder and president, sought to connect its programs to addressing societal problems, particularly the “race question” as it was called at that time. In a period when the races were largely segregated from one another, Blue Ridge provided a space where white ministers, professors, educators, YMCA and YWCA leaders, and southern male and female college students could meet and discuss the subject of race. Furthermore, its programs and workshops also on occasion provided contact with black leaders and African American college students. Reflecting on the impact of Blue Ridge later in life, Weatherford proudly wrote:

Blue Ridge has probably done more than any other single institution to make the white people of the South conscious of their responsibility to serve this largest minority group in America. . . . The spirit of cooperation developed there has sent

⁹ Ethel Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee* (Cincinnati: The Psyche Press, 1971), 149

thousands of the choicest college students back to their respective colleges or out into the world as advocates of better racial understanding.¹⁰

In essence, this conference center's philosophy was that race relations would be improved by broadening bright young students' perspectives on race, and these students, in turn, would change the world through their future work.

Scholars have recognized Weatherford's work to improve race relations and have given passing attention to Blue Ridge's connections in this effort.¹¹ Although the conference center remained "officially" segregated until 1952, this was never strictly true, as African Americans attended as speakers and student delegates throughout its existence. While their attendance was limited, in the context of the segregated and racially hostile South, even a small presence was significant. Recently, Sara Trowbridge Combs has examined Blue Ridge as one of several educational initiatives Weatherford instituted to improve understanding between blacks and whites at this time.¹² However,

¹⁰ W.D. Weatherford, "My Experience in Race Relations," p. 10, folder 3678c, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers #3831, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

¹¹ See Dykeman and Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change*, 24, 45, 59, 63, 66; George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 176–178; Sosna, *Silent South*, 16–18, 20–22, 77; Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929–1959* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 21–22; McMurry, *George Washington Carver*, 35, 201–202, 206; Robert F. Martin, *Howard Kester*, 22, 25–26; David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 35; and John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) 44–48, 74, 77, 122–123, 130, 159, 175, and 426. A short, popular history of Blue Ridge has also been produced by the institution; see *Eureka!: A Century of YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly* (n.p., 2005). For extended studies of Weatherford see Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966); George Peter Antone, Jr., "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906–1946" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969); and Sara Trowbridge Combs, "Race Reform in the Early Twentieth Century South: The Life and Work of Willis Duke Weatherford" (master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2004). Among these extended studies of Weatherford, Dykeman and Combs give the most attention to Blue Ridge. While Dykeman's biography of Weatherford provides helpful information on Blue Ridge and the limitations it worked under, Combs' thesis provides the most scholarly examination of the Blue Ridge Assembly.

¹² See Chapter 4 "Weatherford's Campaign for Race Education." Combs also examines a conference to discuss lynching that was held at Blue Ridge in 1917. See chapter 5 "The Blue Ridge Assembly: Forum for Interracial Debate" in Combs, "Race Reform."

her treatment is mainly descriptive and neglects to fully explore the limits under which Blue Ridge worked and the institution's uniqueness for this period in the South. The present chapter seeks to expand upon her work by providing a deeper examination of Blue Ridge's impact from 1910 to 1952 and by emphasizing the center's distinctiveness and limitations. This YMCA retreat was an important place for improving race relations in the period because it provided a site where the subject could be discussed and a space where blacks and whites could communicate. The environment influenced future southern leaders who came to challenge segregation and the racial inequality that existed in this period.

From 1912 to 1952 Blue Ridge remained one of the very few southern places where the subject of race was not off limits. Indeed, in the South of the 1910s and 1920s there were not other similar arenas of the size and scale of Blue Ridge to have such radical conversations. There really was no other *place* like it. While it is true that the socialist labor school Commonwealth College—located in rural Arkansas—did begin its existence in 1922, its student body and faculty never included African Americans.¹³ Moreover, its enrollment remained no greater than fifty-five.¹⁴ In the 1930s, more extreme options would spring up, yet these ventures too were reticent to attempt desegregation. The Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, which would later become an important training center for participants in the civil rights movement, began

¹³ William H. Cobb, *Radical Education in the Rural South: Commonwealth College, 1922–1940* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 113. Indeed, Cobb notes that a black lecturer declined an invitation to visit the school in the 1930s because of the hostility toward African Americans in that area.

¹⁴ Cobb, *Radical Education in the Rural South*, 113.

in 1932.¹⁵ In 1934 it decided against having black students at the school, fearing the backlash from the local community.¹⁶ The exceptionally progressive arts school, Black Mountain College (which ironically held its campus at Blue Ridge between 1933 and 1941), also refused to integrate even in the early 1940s.¹⁷ It too feared local opposition, considering the risks of “arson and violence.”¹⁸ Another radical undertaking, Clarence Jordan’s Koinonia—an interracial farm community in Georgia—did not become organized until 1942.¹⁹ Overall, radical organizations were virtually non-existent in the South between 1910 and 1930.

Individual radicals who questioned segregation were also largely absent from the region until the early 1930s. Glenda Gilmore recognizes this fact in *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (2008). Indeed, she focuses on “outside agitators”—particularly expatriates and communists who fought against the racial status quo of this period.²⁰ Other scholars like Anthony Dunbar who have examined radicalism in this era find little activity before 1930.²¹ In those years, if one were radical, one typically had to leave the South.

When Blue Ridge opened its doors in 1912, the South was truly a racially divided region. During the early twentieth century this section of the United States had become

¹⁵ See John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932–1962* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988). Ironically, the founders of Highlander—Don West and Miles Horton—hatched the school’s idea after meeting at Blue Ridge in 1932 (p. 17). See also “Interview with Don West,” January 22, 1975, Interview E-0016, Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

¹⁶ Glen, *Highlander*, 30.

¹⁷ Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: Dutton, 1972), 179.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ See Tracy Elaine K’Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997).

²⁰ Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 5.

²¹ Anthony Dunbar’s study of southern radicals takes its starting date in 1929. See Dunbar, *Against the Grain*.

more entrenched in segregation and racism.²² Jim Crow laws became more detailed, and hostility between blacks and whites intensified. Morton Sosna notes that the years between 1890 and 1920 “were in many ways the grimmest that blacks had faced since the end of slavery,” with “Violence, disenfranchisement, and tightening segregation characteriz[ing] Southern race relations.”²³ Throughout the South racial violence raged during these years. High numbers of lynchings took place, with over 700 occurring in the region between 1904 and 1913.²⁴ Race riots also erupted in major southern cities at the turn of the twentieth century, including Wilmington, North Carolina (1898), New Orleans (1900), and Atlanta (1906).²⁵ Segregation not only separated blacks and whites in public facilities, transportation, and schools but also pervaded the lives of these groups. African Americans and whites often lived in different areas of town and frequented their respective shops, doctors, and churches. In large part, the two races lived in separate worlds, and what little interaction did occur took place as whites employed black servants

²² See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²³ Sosna, *Silent South*, 11.

²⁴ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 96. Antone draws these statistics from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889–1918* (New York: N.A.A.C.P., 1919), 29.

²⁵ Egerton, *Speak Now*, 39. For the Wilmington riot see David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 92–117. For New Orleans see William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976). For Atlanta see Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Jack C. Knight, “Reckoning with Violence: W. E. B. Du Bois and the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot,” *Journal of Southern History* 62 (November 1996): 727–766; Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001); Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875–1906* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 147–166; David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

and farm workers. Amid this polarized context, Weatherford organized the Blue Ridge Association.

While the center was a Christian institution, it went beyond simply training YMCA leaders in methods of evangelism. Blue Ridge worked to build Christian leadership, teaching the application of faith principles to relationships in society. A variety of summer conferences, programs, and activities addressed these concerns to college students, YMCA leaders, educators, ministers, social workers, and business leaders. Among the center's objectives, according to Weatherford, was to try "constructively to find Jesus' attitude toward human life," and he hoped this attitude could be applied to people's "relation to others in business, in manufacturing—race relations and industrial problems."²⁶ In short, Weatherford argued that the "central aim of Blue Ridge" was "To help to bring Jesus' religion to bear on modern life, and to help to realize Jesus' dream for society."²⁷ Overall, as Blue Ridge addressed racial issues, it concentrated on changing the perspectives and attitudes of individuals who came in contact with its programs. It was not a place that argued for structural changes in the political or economic system. Rather, it sought to change how people interacted with one another in day-to-day life—particularly how whites perceived and treated African Americans. While there are obvious limitations to this individualized approach, Blue Ridge's effort to challenge the racial status quo in this period deserves analysis because no other place like it existed in the South.

Much of the conference center's attention was focused on white YMCA and YWCA college students. Weatherford and the Blue Ridge leadership assumed that the

²⁶ W. D. Weatherford, "The Constructive Message of Blue Ridge," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, October, 1924, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

participants' youth made them most open to new ideas about race and other subjects. The main event for these young men and women was the annual Southern Student Conference.²⁸ Students participated in various workshops and activities and heard presentations. These young men and women were exposed to prominent southern and national politicians, educators, and religious leaders including William Jennings Bryan, William Louis Poteat, and Harry Emerson Fosdick.²⁹ It was usually during these conferences that white students had interaction with African American speakers and YMCA delegates from black colleges.

Beyond those students who attended the Southern Student Conference, Blue Ridge had perhaps a more profound impact upon the limited number of young men and women who served as the center's working staff. Each summer, roughly one hundred juniors, seniors, and graduate students from southern colleges came to Blue Ridge to care for the center's facilities and take classes offered by Weatherford and other professors.³⁰ Known affectionately as "PW's" —"Poor Working Girls" and "Poor Working Boys"—these students were supposed to have a B average or better and be involved in some "Christian enterprise on their respective campuses" to be considered.³¹ While at Blue

²⁸ Until the late 1920s, the YWCA and YMCA conferences were held separately, yet took place in consecutive weeks at the start of June each summer. See "1921 Blue Ridge Conferences," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, April, 1921, 1.

²⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 111–112. Poteat was a key progressive liberal of the early twentieth century and longtime president of Wake Forest College (1905–1927). See Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000). Fosdick was one of the most prominent liberal Baptist ministers and writers of the twentieth century. Adding to his notoriety was his role as the first pastor of New York's Riverside Church—an institution largely funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. See Robert Moats Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). A number of other prominent religious and educational leaders came to Blue Ridge in these years including: Frank Porter Graham, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Howard Odum, Rupert Vance, Arthur Raper, Liston Pope, and Samuel Chiles Mitchell.

³⁰ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 85–86; and Forrest D. Brown, "Blue Ridge Summer Staff," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, November, 1923, 10.

³¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 87–88; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A.*, 617.

Ridge they took classes for college credit.³² Overall, scholarship was an important component to this summer experience.

Yet while these classes were a cornerstone of Blue Ridge's race relations program, the manual labor these students performed was a foundational aspect as well. According to Wilma Dykeman's biography, Weatherford believed that "the experience of slavery had left a deep psychological scar on the South and its attitude toward work. He reasoned that the slave hated labor because it branded him as inferior, and the white man shunned labor because he thought it was the slave's province."³³ Weatherford wanted to change these attitudes and instill instead the idea "that any task which added richness to human existence was a sacred task."³⁴ As summer workers went about their responsibilities, Blue Ridge leadership held them to high standards in speech and behavior. Racist language in particular was not permitted among the staff. One anecdote from the first summer that Blue Ridge operated provides a good image of the tone Weatherford tried to set there.³⁵ A young woman from a Virginia teacher's college lost her purse (which contained her money and train ticket) while traveling to the center.³⁶ To help with this dilemma Weatherford assigned her a spot in the dining hall as a waitress. When Weatherford looked in later to see how she handled this work, he found she had left the job. Weatherford went on to find her crying in her room, where she complained

³² These students were able to take classes offered by the Southern College's summer quarter. Dykeman notes that Weatherford also often taught a course on philosophy of religion. See Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 86.

³³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁵ For the dating of this event see W. D. Weatherford's personal notebook titled "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina. This home is now occupied by Weatherford's daughter-in-law, Anne Weatherford who made these documents available.

³⁶ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 87.

“I can’t serve a table. That is what niggers do in my home.”³⁷ Weatherford responded “firmly” and “gently. . . that any labor which served a human being’s needs was sacred and worthwhile” and that “the word ‘Negro’ was spelled with a capital ‘N’ and did not have two ‘gg’s’ or an ‘i’ in it.”³⁸

The conference center also employed black servants on its grounds in these years.³⁹ Approximately fifteen male and female African Americans worked cleaning cottages, providing food services, taking care of the laundry, and running the boiler house—the majority working in the kitchen.⁴⁰ Some of these workers came in daily from Black Mountain, while others were housed in segregated living quarters—Booker T. Washington Hall—at Blue Ridge.⁴¹ Yet, with over a hundred white college and graduate students responsible each summer for baggage services, laundry, cleaning, grounds’ care, and serving food, Weatherford’s special collegiate labor force handled the vast majority of the Blue Ridge work.⁴²

Between 1912 and 1944, Weatherford estimated that 3,200 students worked in a staff capacity.⁴³ While this number is not particularly large, it was Weatherford’s aim that these men and women would contribute to transforming the lives of many more. He believed they represented the South’s future. Because they were potential leaders,

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁹ A 1920 article in *The Blue Ridge Voice* notes a “special dining room for colored servants” being added to the main dining area that year. See “Building Program at Blue Ridge,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, January, 1920, 1.

⁴⁰ See “Number of Delegates and Leaders at Each Conference of 1928,” folder 745, Weatherford Papers and “Colored Help 1928,” folder 823, Weatherford Papers.

⁴¹ “Schedule of Property Owned by the Blue Ridge Association,” folder 747, Weatherford Papers and Weatherford to M. T. Workman, July 10, 1929, folder 879, Weatherford Papers.

⁴² See J. J. King to Weatherford, February 20, 1926, folder 346, Weatherford Papers; Brown, “Blue Ridge Summer Staff,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, November, 1923, 10; B. F. Vincent, “Blue Ridge Working Staff, Summer of 1926,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, February, 1927, 11–15; and “Number of Delegates and Leaders at Each Conference of 1928,” folder 745, Weatherford Papers.

⁴³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 93.

Weatherford hoped to transform their minds through this summer program of work and study and lead them to positively impact their schools and communities.⁴⁴ According to Weatherford's records, about a quarter of these young men and women went on to "Christian or social" work, becoming ministers, missionaries, social workers, and YMCA/YWCA secretaries.⁴⁵

Many of these YMCA secretaries took advantage of graduate training that was available at Blue Ridge in these years. Beginning in 1919, Weatherford had organized the Southern College of the YMCA in Nashville, Tennessee, to train YMCA leaders for the South.⁴⁶ The summer quarter of this program operated at Blue Ridge until 1936, when the school folded.⁴⁷ Running from the middle of June to the end of August, these graduate students took several courses and had access to the speakers and programs associated with the various conferences that assembled on the grounds throughout the summer. Many of these students were also part of the working staff, thereby enabling them to pay for their educational experience.

Overall, Blue Ridge had a relatively significant impact upon a portion of white southern young men and women in this period. The conference center's activity grew steadily through the 1910s, bringing in 1552 people in 1912; 1771 in 1913; 2000 in 1914; 2100 in 1915; 1650 in the 1916 (apparently a "flood year"); 2200 in 1917; 4381 in 1918;

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁵ Willis Duke Weatherford, "The Training Program of the Southern Y.M.C.A.'s, p. 17, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. See also Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A.*, 617.

⁴⁶ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 129. Southern College of the YMCA changed its name in the late 1920s to the YMCA Graduate School in order to focus exclusively on graduate education. See also Antone, "The Y.M.C.A. Graduate School," 67-82.

⁴⁷ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 171; O. E. Brown, "The Fortieth International Convention of the Young Men's Christian Association, Detroit, Mich., Nov. 19-23, 1919," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, December, 1919, 1; and advertisement for "Southern College of Young Men's Christian Associations," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, April, 1921, 18.

and 4258 in 1919.⁴⁸ While the program was growing in participants, it also was casting a wide net across the South, pulling in people from many places. The first issue of *The Blue Ridge Voice*—the center’s official magazine—noted that the 1919 conference represented “practically every college, every Y.M.C.A., every Y.W.C.A., and many of the churches, clubs, etc. in the South.”⁴⁹ In this period, with this type of reach, the assembly served as an important gathering place for southern college and graduate students.

Records from the Blue Ridge programs of the 1910s also indicate that the center’s impact went beyond students. Church leaders, educators, and business professionals were also the beneficiaries of the assembly’s opportunities.⁵⁰ Given the center’s broad collection of current and future southern leaders, it was a key site where issues and problems of the South could be discussed.

Blue Ridge was important not only for the constituency it served but also for the atmosphere it fostered. Specifically, it aspired to freedom of speech. In 1924 Weatherford penned an editorial in *The Blue Ridge Voice* entitled “The Constructive Message of Blue Ridge” defending this policy.⁵¹ It seems there had recently been a controversy over the center’s activities, particularly what some of the speakers had said. Weatherford responded to these complaints by insisting:

⁴⁸ “Building Program at Blue Ridge,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, January, 1920, 1.

⁴⁹ “Debutante,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, November, 1919, 1.

⁵⁰ Blue Ridge’s breadth of exposure can be seen from the 1924 summer schedule that included the following conferences: Employed Officers’ Conference; Southern Student Conference, YWCA; Southern Student Conference, YMCA; Missionary Education Conference; Home Demonstration Agents’ Conference; Community Conference, YWCA; Southern Summer School, YMCA; Southern Industrial Conference; Southern Summer School of Social Service and Christian Workers; Southern College of YMCA, summer quarter; SCY Camp for Boys; Travelers’ Aid Conference; and Regional Conference on Industrial Education. See “Blue Ridge Conferences, 1924,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, June 1924, 1.

⁵¹ Weatherford, “The Constructive Message,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, October, 1924, 1, 13.

We believe 99 per cent of the things said at Blue Ridge are sound and constructive, forward looking and helpful. The other 1 per cent is purely personal opinions, not the official utterances of Blue Ridge. To avoid this 1 per cent would mean to put a censorship on all expression. This would kill all progress and stifle truth at its birth. It would be a sad day when such a step was taken. We have confidence that the 99 per cent constructive truth will not in any sense be vitiated by the 1 per cent of negative teaching. It is simply the adventure of finding truth, and those who will not make the adventure surely will never know the truth.⁵²

In short, Weatherford wanted Blue Ridge to be a place open to ideas.

This openness was not always met with approval from the residents of the surrounding area. On occasion, Blue Ridge received anonymous threats when it became known African American speakers would be attending the center.⁵³ Indeed, one of these threats seems to have been followed up. In August 1919 a black YMCA secretary came to Blue Ridge and a “disgruntled white man in the neighborhood made his disapproval of this integration known.” Several weeks later the laundry building near Lee Hall burned. Weatherford believed the fire to have been the work of this man.⁵⁴

Beyond these physical threats, Blue Ridge also had to consider the reactions of its supporters and be careful not to alienate them. Particularly, funding issues placed limits on Blue Ridge’s activities. Monetary support for the center in these years largely came from three areas: northern and southern philanthropic organizations and individuals, southern YMCAs, and conference fees.⁵⁵ Southern YMCA’s, however, contributed only minimally, as funds were given on a voluntary basis. Philanthropic organizations and

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 98.

⁵⁴ Quote in *Ibid.*, 98. Date is based upon reference to a new laundry building being built in “Building Program at Blue Ridge,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, January, 1920, 1. This article notes “The laundry building which burned August 1, 1919, is already replaced.”

⁵⁵ C. Roger Hibbard, telephone conversation with author, May 1, 2008. Hibbard is the current Executive Director of the Blue Ridge Assembly and aided in the publication of the center’s centennial history, *Eureka!: A Century of YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly*. According to Hibbard, Blue Ridge also sold some of its mountain property in the years before 1944 in order to keep the institution in operation.

individuals, on the other hand, while proving helpful to larger infrastructural projects and special conferences, nevertheless could not be depended upon to sustain all of Blue Ridge's budget costs. The fees that conference participants paid remained essential in keeping the institution afloat. Thus, it was necessary to keep the program schedule full and well attended. As a result, Blue Ridge had an important incentive not to be seen by southern leaders as too radical of a place. If it were, then college and university presidents, as well as YMCA and YWCA leaders, would hesitate to send their students there, not wanting to expose them to "dangerous" ideas. If fewer students came, not only would funding be less; but also more importantly, the vision of Blue Ridge would not be realized. In short, there always remained this tension between pushing against racial prejudice, but not pushing too hard and losing both monetary and general support for Blue Ridge.

An exchange between Weatherford and a YWCA secretary chairing the Blue Ridge Committee for the Southern Student Conference of 1926 illustrates this tension nicely. Ruth Scandrett, general secretary for the Florida State College for Women, wrote Weatherford in early May 1926, requesting his sanction for inviting to Blue Ridge "colored speakers who will have the privileges that are extended to other guests in the use of rooms and in the use of the dining hall."⁵⁶ Until this time Blue Ridge policy was to place black guests in a private room separate from the main dining hall for their meals. Weatherford responded with a three-page letter that illustrated how he attempted to balance idealism with practicality. While he was sympathetic to Scandrett's request, he denied it and outlined the conference center's rationale. Weatherford pointed out the

⁵⁶ Ruth Scandrett to W. D. Weatherford, May 10, 1926, folder 302, Weatherford Papers.

contributions the center had made to improving race relations in the South but maintained that the Blue Ridge Board felt that “To put colored delegates in the main dining room was in their opinion to dogmatize on what the South should do as a whole,” and that this act would be objected to by “scores of parents” and “thousands of our other friends.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, Weatherford noted what consequences these objections might have on Blue Ridge’s finances. Pointing out the monetary limits under which the center was already working, he insisted that “they would practically empty their buildings if it was noised abroad that we seated colored guests indiscriminately in our main dining hall.”⁵⁸ In the end Weatherford urged that if Scandrett and the YWCA conference wanted to bring African American guests, they should seat them in the private dining room. If white conference participants would like to sit with them there, that would be fine. This compromise, surmised Weatherford, allowed for these black guests to be at Blue Ridge. It also avoiding the public display of blacks and whites eating together that many southern whites would have felt was being forced upon them. Nevertheless, this was a concession Scandrett and the YWCA were not willing to make.⁵⁹ It is interesting that Weatherford had no problem with some of the whites choosing to eat with the black guests. It appears that for him personally this was no issue; however, as the leader of the institution he was very concerned with how this public act could be offensive to Blue Ridge’s white guests.

⁵⁷ W. D. Weatherford to Ruth Scandrett, May 20, 1926, folder 302, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Scandrett to Weatherford, May 29, 1926, folder 361, Weatherford Papers.

Reflecting later in life about his overall work in race relations, Weatherford recognized that his compromises on these issues had often left people on both sides of the question unsatisfied. He commented

This work has brought me into many very delicate and difficult positions. It has caused its full share of criticism and heartache. Some of my white friends have berated me for going too fast; some of my colored friends have called me names because I would not go faster.⁶⁰

Struggling with this dilemma and the limitations under which he worked in this period, Weatherford still supported freedom of expression at Blue Ridge, recognizing that to restrict it would weaken the center's influence.

Thus—despite its concessions—given the amount and diversity of conferences and participants, Blue Ridge remained a unique location where “the race problem” could be discussed in the 1910s and 1920s. Weatherford's attention to free speech shows also that it was intentionally trying to be this kind of place. One symbolic addition to the center in 1920 further illustrates this point. In that year, Blue Ridge's main meeting chamber—Robert E. Lee Hall—added an Abraham Lincoln portrait to go along with the other portrait of the hall's namesake.⁶¹ Weatherford's speech at the portrait's unveiling asserted that “Lincoln and Lee [were] not Northern and Southern, but American.”⁶² He went on to say, “We believe that these two great souls as they look out from their portraits across this room . . . will forever be a sign to those who enter our building that there is no North and there is no South, but we are one and inseparable.”⁶³ While plans were mentioned at this same event to also “ultimately” include a Stonewall Jackson

⁶⁰ Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” p. 11, folder 3678c, Weatherford Papers.

⁶¹ “The New Lincoln Portrait in Lee Hall,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, June, 1920, 1.

⁶² W. D. Weatherford, “Why We Wanted a Lincoln Portrait in Lee Hall,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, June 1920, 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

painting in the hall, the addition of Lincoln's portrait was emblematic of the center's openness to racial concerns.⁶⁴ Also part of this ceremony was the Fisk University Quartette's rendering of "O Freedom."⁶⁵ Perhaps the Lincoln painting made these singers feel a little more welcome at Blue Ridge and may have comforted future participants and speakers who came to the hall as well.

Given Blue Ridge's openness to racial matters, it is not surprising that it hosted southern Christian leaders, black and white, for conferences on race. One such meeting took place in 1917, when Blue Ridge was the site for a law and order conference. This meeting brought together forty-eight "educators, ministers, social workers, clubwomen, church workers, doctors, judges, public officials, and YMCA/YWCA personnel" who represented "nearly every state in the South . . . [and] included twelve women and several blacks."⁶⁶ The conference focused on the problem of lynching but also discussed the migration of southern blacks, legal measures to prevent mob violence, methods to change public perceptions of lynching, and "the role of religion in racial reform."⁶⁷

Blue Ridge was also the location for early efforts by the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). In August of 1920, a three-day conference was held there

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* David Blight has recognized the importance Lincoln's image held for African Americans in the early twentieth century. He notes that Lincoln's likeness could be found in black homes and churches, and particularly at events celebrating African American freedom. Blight writes "Strategically, and with genuine sentiment . . . blacks honored Lincoln in season and out, but especially on the days when they remembered their freedom as a national matter." See David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 369-370. Speaking more broadly on the importance of Lincoln's contribution to African Americans' freedom at this time, Robert Russa Moton acknowledged the president's significance. See Robert Russa Moton, "The Negro's Debt to Lincoln," *The Southern Workman* 51 (1922), 329-334.

⁶⁵ Weatherford, "Why We Wanted a Lincoln Portrait in Lee Hall."

⁶⁶ Combs, "Race Reform," 107. The proceedings of this conference were published. See Willis Duke Weatherford, ed., *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Held at Blue Ridge, N.C., August 4th, 5th, and 6th, Nineteen Hundred and Seventeen* (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917).

⁶⁷ Combs, "Race Reform," 107-108.

bringing together religious leaders to discuss the “relationship of the church to race problems.”⁶⁸ Including over seventy-five participants, it assembled a range of ministers and college presidents from across the South. These participants voiced their support for the CIC and local interracial organizations; denounced lynching; called for better schools and housing for blacks; and urged white southerners to live up to the “equal” element of the “separate but equal” creed. Rather than challenging the South’s segregation laws and customs, the group wanted to address the stark unfairness of that system as it was practiced. Fitting well with the philosophy of the CIC, their published declaration—“An Appeal to the Christian People of the South”—began by affirming loyalty to “the principle of racial integrity” and ended by noting an “unswerving and unalterable adherence to both the principle and the practice of race integrity.”⁶⁹ This coded language indicated they held to the South’s segregated customs and specifically believed that the white and black races should remain distinct. Even more liberal southerners often felt it necessary to reveal their faithfulness to this principle in order to ensure their hearing, and such statements also kept many white southerners from writing this group off as radical. Overall, this well-intentioned CIC group was working within Jim Crow to alleviate racial problems.

While it is unclear if that gathering included African Americans, Blue Ridge increasingly did become a place where blacks could speak and attend as participants. Reflecting upon his work on the subject of race later in life, Weatherford commented that “Blue Ridge was the first place in the South where outstanding colored leaders could come to present to the leadership of the white South in large numbers, the needs and

⁶⁸ “An Appeal to the Christian People of the South,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, January, 1921, 12–13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

problems of the Negro people and the ways of meeting the same.”⁷⁰ According to Weatherford, the first instance when African Americans were present at Blue Ridge was sometime around 1915.⁷¹ While such interracial interactions were rare and scattered in the 1910s, in the years to come the presence of blacks became more regular. Prior to 1917, Blue Ridge records are very limited, so the reasoning behind the center’s drive to bring in more African American participants is left to speculation. More than likely this new energy resulted from Weatherford’s concern over increased racism and violence following the return of black soldiers after WWI. Amid this tense atmosphere new methods and strategies were urgently needed and probably found more willing reception. Weatherford’s membership in the CIC, his close association with other southern liberals, and the relative seclusion of Blue Ridge in the mountains of North Carolina made the center an obvious place to bring blacks and whites together. Indeed, the earliest African American speakers to come had close ties with the CIC.

Another contributing factor to an increased presence of African Americans at Blue Ridge was the institution’s age. By 1919 Blue Ridge had been in existence for over a decade and had become an established southern conference center. As noted earlier, Blue Ridge had grown from serving 1552 people in 1912 to handling over 4381 participants in 1918. Considering this increase in attendance, Blue Ridge must not have been seen as too far out of the mainstream, or as a place too radical for college YMCA’s and YWCA’s and other conference groups to send people. With this type of stability and in the context of this racially charged period, it is likely Weatherford and Blue Ridge

⁷⁰ Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” p. 9, folder 3678c, Weatherford Papers.

⁷¹ W. D. Weatherford to A. D. Beittel, December 16, 1941, folder 2908, Weatherford Papers.

leadership saw it as their Christian responsibility to work to improve race relations through some limited inclusion of African Americans at the center's conferences and programs. In short, Blue Ridge's stable reputation and the circumstances of the times allowed for some risk to be taken toward more progressive initiatives.

African American observers of this period recognized black attendance at Blue Ridge as noteworthy. In late July of 1920 Lester Walton—a writer for a national black weekly newspaper—reported the visit of Tuskegee Institute principal Robert Russa Moton to the assembly.⁷² Moton, the successor to Booker T. Washington, came to address a gathering connected to the CIC and to provide an African American perspective on contemporary race relations. Walton, who traveled with Moton to Blue Ridge, had been skeptical of this new interracial organization. Noting his Missouri birthplace, Walton recognized he had the “‘You’ve got to show me’ trait.”⁷³ Yet his remarks about the visit were positive, and he left the meeting quite optimistic about the possibilities of the nascent CIC. According to Walton, Moton spoke to a crowded audience on July 18 on the subjects of lynching, social equality, disenfranchisement, and Jim Crow transportation. The next morning, Moton led a small discussion class of young men and women from Mississippi. Even after the success of the night before, Walton admitted he was still somewhat incredulous as to how this smaller group would respond, particularly since they were “White Mississippians and Baptists!”⁷⁴ Yet he reported during the session, “All questions and answers were respectfully given and without embarrassment

⁷² Lester A. Walton, “Interracial Commission on Southern Conditions,” *New York Age*, July 31, 1920.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Exclamation point in original.

or trace of ill feeling.”⁷⁵ Overall, Walton described the atmosphere at Blue Ridge to be open to and respectful of Moton’s visit. The tone of Walton’s article shows his surprise and pleasure at what he had witnessed. Absent from this report, however, is where Moton and Walton lodged for the one night of their stay.

Blue Ridge records indicate that Moton’s association with the center continued in subsequent years. He seems to have returned in 1921 and 1922 for the YMCA Southern Student Conference.⁷⁶ The length of his visits, as well as his accommodations, remain unclear.⁷⁷ Weatherford and Moton stayed on friendly terms and in communication in future years. Indeed, Weatherford took student groups to visit Tuskegee several times in the 1920s.⁷⁸ Moton’s presence at Blue Ridge in the early 1920s signaled a trend of black speakers coming on a regular basis to the conference center.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ The *Blue Ridge Voice* announced the planned speakers for the summers in its April edition of 1921 and 1922. Both issues list “R. R. Moton, President of Tuskegee Institute” as part of the summer program. See *The Blue Ridge Voice*, April, 1921 and April 1922, 4.

⁷⁷ One questionable source may provide light on Moton’s visits to Blue Ridge. See Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee*. Edwards claims that Moton had been a guest speaker in 1919 at the conference center and had been placed in a separate cottage with meals brought to him there. She insists that Weatherford was “apologetic” to Moton for these “arrangements” and that Weatherford noted that since Blue Ridge “was just establishing itself in the South,” it was “trying to avoid friction” (114). However, since no other sources show Moton to have visited Blue Ridge in 1919, her assertion remains dubious. Perhaps, this story may refer to the accommodations that existed for Moton during 1921 or 1922. Edwards’s biography of George Washington Carver was completed in 1948, but a publisher could not be found. In 1971 she privately published the volume in a limited edition of 200 copies. Her book was written with the assistance of interviews from W. D. Weatherford and Jim Hardwick. Hardwick had met Carver at Blue Ridge in 1923 and maintained a close relationship with him until latter’s death. Edwards’s book is a questionable source because several dates she gives for events do not match with the primary source record. The book is without footnotes, and thus her sources cannot be traced. It seems likely that the book’s material relating to Blue Ridge is largely built upon her interviews with Weatherford in the 1940s. See “Foreword” ([vi]) and “An Explanation” ([viii–ix]). Linda O. McMurry’s excellent biography of Carver also notes that Moton had been to Blue Ridge in 1920. She claims he was there for the “Southern regional conference” and that he “was housed and fed separately.” However, how she arrived at this information is unclear, as she cites only Lester Walton’s *New York Age* article, which makes no mention of this. See McMurry, *George Washington Carver*, 201 and 344.

⁷⁸ Carver to Weatherford, April 20, 1925, folder 3615, Weatherford Papers; R. R. Moton to Weatherford, May 25, 1925, folder 3615, Weatherford Papers; and Weatherford to Moton, February 5, 1930, folder 703, Weatherford Papers. Interestingly, Weatherford brought both his male and female students to Tuskegee. See pictures, P-3831, folder 17 of 20, Weatherford Papers.

In 1923 another member of Tuskegee's faculty—George Washington Carver—came to Blue Ridge.⁷⁹ By this time, Carver was famous. Since the mid-1910s—with his invitation to the British Royal Society for the Arts, a supposed job offer from Thomas Edison, and his work with peanuts—Carver had been gaining status.⁸⁰ Furthermore, his 1921 meeting before the House Ways and Means Committee regarding the peanut tariff essentially fixed him as “the peanut man.”⁸¹ Newspapers featured pieces on Carver, and in March 1923 the *Atlanta Journal* devoted a full page to him.⁸² Between 1920 and 1922, Carver had even been invited to speak to a few southern white college audiences.⁸³ Therefore, it was with this background in mind that Weatherford invited Carver to Blue Ridge as a guest for the YMCA Southern Student Conference held in June of that year.⁸⁴

Carver's visit to Blue Ridge was a huge success. Writing to a friend soon after the conference, Carver reported having given “a demonstration on the possibilities of the peanut” and that his audience “seemed to have enjoyed it immensely.”⁸⁵ At that event, the scientist had spoken before the entire gathering. Carver also brought an exhibit on agriculture that was displayed throughout the week. Out of his experience at Blue Ridge, Carver struck up several relationships with students and began exchanging letters with them. Throughout his life, he had a tendency to develop such friendships. He mentored

⁷⁹ See “Speakers and Leaders,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, May, 1923, 8; and J. E. Johnson to Carver, May 12, 1923, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame 380.

⁸⁰ McMurtry, *George Washington Carver*, 178. Edison's job offer to Carver remains undocumented. While Carver often referred to it in speeches, he was never able to produce a copy of the telegram which made the offer nor could the Edison Laboratory confirm it. For a discussion of this issue see pages 177–178.

⁸¹ Barry Mackintosh, “George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth” *Journal of Southern History* 42 (November 1976): 509.

⁸² Mackintosh, “George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth,” 517.

⁸³ McMurtry, *George Washington Carver*, 201.

⁸⁴ Weatherford to Carver, April 19, 1923, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame 312.

⁸⁵ Carver to Lyman Ward, July 6, 1923, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame 558.

a large number of young men and corresponded with them.⁸⁶ Some of these youngsters even came to visit Carver at Tuskegee. His collected papers from there are filled with letters he received and the carbon copies of those he sent. Carver's appearance at Blue Ridge in 1923 was the beginning of his connection with a number of white YMCA students.

The most significant friendship Carver developed from this visit was with Jim Hardwick, a student at Weatherford's YMCA Graduate School.⁸⁷ On July 2 Hardwick wrote to Carver, noting that he had already received a letter from Carver and went on to say, "Again professor let me tell you how Christ has used you to enable me to see more of this great love in this world of ours. I believe He is using you in a way that you cannot realize and like you said I guess you are better not to be able to realize it."⁸⁸ Hardwick remained in correspondence with Carver until 1937 and received nearly 300 letters in that period.⁸⁹ Hardwick was from Blacksburg, Virginia, had attended Virginia Tech, and been captain of its football team.⁹⁰ He was also the descendant of slave owners. Carver later came to visit Hardwick and his mother at their plantation.⁹¹ In the coming years Hardwick and Carver made plans to meet at Blue Ridge for other conferences.⁹²

⁸⁶ According to Edwards, Carver wrote thousands of letters to whites during his life. Often in longhand, "They ranged from concise replies to factual questions to heartfelt outpourings of his philosophy of life." Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee*, 149.

⁸⁷ Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee*, 119.

⁸⁸ Jim Hardwick to Carver, July 2, 1923, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame 539.

⁸⁹ Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee*, [vi].

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157. Hardwick, in many ways, embodied the remnants of the YMCA's focus on muscular Christianity.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 157, 182–83.

⁹² Hardwick to Carver, February, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame 863. In this letter Hardwick wrote "I would rather be with you at Blue Ridge than anywhere. I look forward to this and pray Christ to give you a great message for the boys there."

Among the many intriguing aspects of this friendship is how the two met. According to Ethel Edwards's biography of Carver, the two chatted briefly the night of Carver's speech after Weatherford's introduction. Hardwick later followed up this initial encounter by going to Carver's room in Lee Hall to talk.⁹³ What is interesting about Edwards's account is that apparently Carver was not placed in segregated quarters but was lodged in the center's main accommodations. Furthermore, Edwards insists Carver also ate with Weatherford in the dining hall.⁹⁴ If Carver was indeed not segregated on this trip, Blue Ridge was an extremely open place for its time. However, even if Edwards's version is incorrect, Carver's visit to the conference still remains significant because it exposed these white college students to a professional African American scientist.⁹⁵ Likely most of these young men had never been in the presence of an accomplished black specialist before. His presence there showed them that African Americans were capable of high achievement.⁹⁶ Weatherford had intended Blue Ridge to

⁹³ Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee*, 121.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119. There is some question to the accuracy of Edwards's story. First, she incorrectly dates their meeting to 1922 (p. 119). The letters between Carver and Hardwick show that they met in 1923. Second, she also claims that Carver had been to Blue Ridge in 1920. She insists he was a guest speaker, and was segregated during his visit, staying in the "Moton Cottage"—the one Moton had been in the previous year. There is no evidence to verify these facts; however, the letters between Carver and those setting up the 1923 trip seem to indicate that Carver had never been to Blue Ridge before. In one letter he asks "Kindly let me know just how I can reach Blue Ridge." See Carver to Johnson, May 22, 1923, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame, 406. Nevertheless, as Edwards's book was based on interviews with Weatherford and Hardwick, it seems likely that there is some truth to what occurred in 1923. The best scholarly biography of Carver is written by Linda McMurry. However, in her telling of the Hardwick/Carver meeting she confuses this even more, repeating information from the alleged 1920 visit of Carver to Blue Ridge and his segregated accommodations. See McMurry, *George Washington Carver*, 202 and 344. The exact details of this historical event still remain unclear.

⁹⁵ Carver's status as a credible scientist has been called into question in recent years. See Mackintosh, "George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth," 507–28 and McMurry, *George Washington Carver*.

⁹⁶ Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin notes the impact seeing professional blacks had on white southerners at this time. In her 1946 autobiography she wrote: "It seems that now and then young men were listening to such a man as Dr. George Carver, who as a notable scientist even though a Negro, was known to pry open Southern minds by the sheer fact of his existence. It was so at least if he appeared before us. To our incredulous minds it took seeing to make us believe or even consider the possibility that Negroes might not *all* (we emphasized *all*) be as inferior as we Southerners supposed; that they could and did achieve—in

be a place where YMCA students' exposure and interaction with professional blacks could subtly change their attitudes and perspectives. Carver's visit may have surpassed even Weatherford's expectations, for in the case of Hardwick specifically, the visit went beyond exposure to the creation of a lasting relationship.

In 1924 Carver returned to Blue Ridge for the Southern Student Conference, arguably making an even greater impact. Writing to John W. Bergthold—then YMCA Student Secretary of the Southern Region—several weeks after that visit, Carver related his extraordinary experience at Blue Ridge. Carver had stayed as a “guest of the Virginia Delegation” during his time there.⁹⁷ This meant that on this visit he had not been segregated but had eaten and slept among the all-white group. Moreover, student interest in Carver had been immense. As soon as he had arrived, people had wanted to have “personal interview[s]” with him; thus, these had to be limited to fifteen minutes per person. He reported that these “would begin at four in the morning” and last until “twelve at night.”⁹⁸ While at Blue Ridge, Carver was also asked by several state delegations to be their guest for the following year, and he was invited by Knoxville College, Berea College, Lynchburg College, Millsaps College, Georgia Tech, and Piedmont College to visit their schools in the coming year.⁹⁹ When Carver wrote Bergthold in early August, Carver had already received forty-one letters from these young men as well as a “peck of the finest apples from one of the N.C. boys.”¹⁰⁰ Carver brought his note to a close by declaring that at Blue Ridge, “The whole atmosphere

some instances, we added; that to them also, or to some of them rather, might belong the full title and dignity of human being.” Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1981 [1946]), 198.

⁹⁷ Carver to Bergthold, August 6, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 137.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Carver to Bergthold, August 6, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 138

¹⁰⁰ Carver to Bergthold, August 6, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 138–139.

seemed to be saturated with the Christ spirit of helpfulness. The dear boys seemed to take special delight in making me very happy. This was equally true of the Professors.”¹⁰¹ His visit had been a sensation.¹⁰²

It appears other noteworthy events transpired at Blue Ridge on this occasion that Carver left out of his story. Howard Kester’s unpublished “Radical Prophets: A History of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen” provides background to why Carver stayed with the Virginia group. Kester had been one of the students from Lynchburg College that hosted Carver. According to him, at a planning retreat in the spring of 1924 for the Southern Student Conference, John Bergthold informed Kester and the other participants that accommodations for Carver had not yet been found.¹⁰³ Since the Lynchburg YMCA delegation was expecting more than twenty students to attend and had already rented a cottage, “Craggy View,” Kester volunteered to let the scientist stay with them.¹⁰⁴ Kester noted, “Upon hearing what I had done, our students were delighted, and they made plans to see that he was comfortably lodged and that at least one of us would share his meals sent over from the dining hall each day.”¹⁰⁵ Since Blue Ridge still segregated the dining of blacks and whites, Carver’s stay, in effect, integrated Blue Ridge.

¹⁰¹ Carver to Bergthold, August 6, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 139.

¹⁰² Nearly forty years after this conference a member of the General Board of Evangelism of the Methodist Church wrote Weatherford acknowledging how this meeting had so greatly influenced him. See George H. Jones to W. D. Weatherford, November 30, 1961, folder 3850, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰³ Kester, “Radical Prophets,” 23.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 23. The cottage was actually “Craggy View.” Blue Ridge Conference records show the speakers, their expenses, and accommodations. One document shows that Carver stayed from June 19–June 22. See “Conference Roster—Southern YMCA Student Conference, Blue Ridge-N.C., June 17–27, 1924,” folder 50a, Weatherford Papers. Interestingly, another speaker—W.C. Craver—is also listed as staying at Craggy from June 19–21. It seems likely that this was William Craver, one of the black leaders of the YMCA. However, there is no other mention of him or why he stayed there. See Mays, *Born to Rebel*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ Kester, “Radical Prophets,” 23.

Kester's version also recounts there had been some controversy over Carver's presence at Blue Ridge. Specifically, the Florida and Louisiana students had "threatened to withdraw en masse" if he spoke.¹⁰⁶ As Carver prepared to take the podium, Will Alexander tried to calm the situation, "chid[ing] the assembled students for their rude and discourteous attitude toward Negroes."¹⁰⁷ Eventually Carver spoke on the subject of diversified agriculture and received hearty applause. Amazingly, Kester claims that the leader of the Florida group stood, explained what his faction had intended to do, and apologized. The Louisiana group also "behaved as Southern gentlemen should."¹⁰⁸ Out of Carver and Kester's interaction that week, the two struck up a close friendship that would last until Carver's death. Less than two weeks after the conference ended, the two had already exchanged letters, with Kester writing to Carver, "You will never, never know just what your friendship means to me."¹⁰⁹

Carver's 1924 experience at Blue Ridge was recognized by other blacks as a significant step forward in race relations. His friend Martin Menafee, the treasurer of the Voorhees Normal and Industrial School in South Carolina, acknowledged his pride in Carver's successful trip and noted that his stay with the Lynchburg boys was "certainly a rare thing to happen among our people."¹¹⁰ He went on to say that "Your trip will be an eye opener in that section as well as other sections where these boys live."¹¹¹ After

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. Kester also places the black female educator, Mary McLeod Bethune, at this gathering. However, Kester's memory on this point appears incorrect. Bethune would come the following year to Blue Ridge and a letter between her and Carver seems to indicate she had never attended Blue Ridge before. See Carver to Mary McLeod Bethune, March 17, 1925, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 1004.

¹⁰⁷ Kester, "Radical Prophets," 24.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24. It is not clear what Kester meant by this statement, particularly whether Carver ever found out their plans to walk out.

¹⁰⁹ Howard Kester to Carver, July 4, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 9.

¹¹⁰ Martin A. Menafee to Carver, July 12, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 60.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Carver shared some of Kester's letters with Menafée, Menafée noted "Many great things are happening."¹¹² It is also clear from Kester's future work that he had been deeply impacted by his meeting Carver. All of this had been made possible by Blue Ridge.

An important detail regarding Carver's visit is that it was to the YMCA—rather than YWCA—Southern Student Conference. In this period in the South racism was often intimately tied with gender concerns. Exposing white college women to black men would have upset a large portion of southerners at this time. This anger could be expressed in violence—or perhaps more likely in this case—by the withdrawal of support for Blue Ridge. Weatherford and the leaders of Blue Ridge were well aware of these risks. As a result when Carver did come to Blue Ridge, it seems that it was for the white male Y students only.¹¹³ Carver's presence or that of other black men would almost certainly have been unwelcome at the YWCA conference. These concerns also surely played a significant part in why Ruth Scandrett (of the Blue Ridge YWCA Southern Student Conference committee) requested female—rather than male—black guests for their 1926 program.¹¹⁴

While Carver's visit primarily influenced the white male students who gathered at Blue Ridge, it also had an effect on the black student delegates who attended. Prior to the conference, Bergthold had notified Carver that "a fraternal delegation of students from the Kings Mountain Student Conference" would also be there "during these two Good-

¹¹² Menafée to Carver, July 19, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 88.

¹¹³ It should be noted that some of the female working staff may also have had exposure to Carver during this visit. Yet the extent of this contact remains unclear as there are no records of correspondence between Carver and "Blue Ridge girls" from this visit. Carver himself would have understood the dangers of such relationships. Perhaps this explains why Carver's Papers include only a few scattered letters between him and the young women he met at speaking events, in comparison to the scores of young men whom he corresponded with throughout his life.

¹¹⁴ See Scandrett to Weatherford, May 10, 1926, folder 302, Weatherford Papers. In this letter Scandrett requests specifically "We should like to have two Negro women for the last three days of our conference."

will or Interracial Days.”¹¹⁵ During this period, Kings Mountain—the YMCA conference center for African Americans—and Blue Ridge exchanged a small number of delegates each year for their conferences. According to Benjamin Mays’s autobiography, while the white students to Kings Mountain were fully integrated into that conference, this was not true for blacks who came to Blue Ridge.¹¹⁶ African American students there were segregated in their accommodations and meals. Yet despite these circumstances, they still attended, and Carver’s presence in 1924 had an impact on at least one of their number. A young man, George W. Watkins, from Virginia Union University wrote Carver in early December of 1924, acknowledging how much he had been “impressed” with Carver and his work and inviting him to visit Richmond and the university.¹¹⁷ It must have been a strange, and yet inspiring, experience for this young African American to have seen a fellow member of his race speaking at the white conference center of the South.

Black speakers continued to attend Blue Ridge from the mid-1920s onward. In 1925 the African American educator, Mary McLeod Bethune, came.¹¹⁸ In the following years several presidents of African American institutions were invited to Blue Ridge—Mordecai Johnson of Howard University in 1926 and John Hope of Morehouse College

¹¹⁵ Berghthold to Carver, June 9, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 7, frame 1240.

¹¹⁶ Mays, *Born to Rebel*, 127.

¹¹⁷ George W. Watkins to Carver, December 8, 1924, Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 515.

¹¹⁸ See Bethune planner, June 23, 1925, Mary McLeod Bethune Papers: The Bethune Foundation Collection, (microfilm ed.; Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), reel 3, frame 829. Carver also writes a letter encouraging her to attend. He recommended that she go instead of himself, insisting “that you will bring an [e]ntirely different and helpful [message] of the race problem before these young white students.” See Carver to Bethune, March 17, 1925 Carver Papers, reel 8, frame 1004.

in 1928.¹¹⁹ While surviving records leave little information on Bethune and Hope's experiences, it is clear Johnson's presence was not quickly forgotten. John Bergthold used Johnson's visit to challenge the southern taboo of whites and blacks eating together. Arriving at Blue Ridge around the time of the evening meal, Johnson was "rushed" into the dining hall by Bergthold to be seated with the other conference guests.¹²⁰ Johnson was light skinned and "passed" without notice as he was served his meal. As a result, this southern dining custom, at least in a technical sense, had been broken.

Johnson presented before the entire conference body a powerful speech/sermon entitled "Christianity in Race Relations."¹²¹ Appealing to these white students who would be the future leaders of the South, he encouraged them to have "reverence for the life of every living creature" because he believed "that kind of reverence w[ould] break down race antagonism in America and in the world."¹²² Johnson was adamant that these students bring the love of Jesus to their relationships with African Americans. He emphasized that change began with how individuals chose to interact with one another. Johnson did not advocate structural and political change in this speech. Indeed, he insisted,

I don't advise you to start out putting your hand on this political measure, and putting your hand on this institution trying to change it around. This is not where you begin. You start out with John Jones when you meet him tomorrow morning—the individual toward the individual—acting radically upon the principles of creative love.¹²³

¹¹⁹ For the presence of John Hope see C. B. Loomis to W. D. Weatherford and J. J. King, May 17, 1928, folder 730, Weatherford Papers; and Southern Student Conference 1928 pamphlet, folder 731, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁰ Martin, *Howard Kester*, 26.

¹²¹ Mordecai Johnson, "Christianity in Race Relations," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, March 1927, p. 7–14.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

Johnson recognized that such actions would have a “cost,” and that students should be willing to bear these if they were to be true to their faith.¹²⁴ Overall, Johnson’s words were representative of Blue Ridge’s approach in furthering race relations. Change would take place as individuals interacted in truly Christian ways with one another.

While Blue Ridge did not directly encourage its participants to challenge the structure of Jim Crow, it did have an impact on this issue. Exposure to ideas at the conference center contributed to some participants questioning southern norms. A controversy involving the interrelated issues of race and gender that arose at Blue Ridge in 1928 illustrates this point.¹²⁵ V. L. Roy, president of the State Normal College in Natchitoches, Louisiana, noted that several white women from his school had complained that at Blue Ridge black delegates had been eating together with whites and staying in the same dormitories.¹²⁶ He circulated this information to other southern college presidents, cautioning them about the dangers of Blue Ridge. Moreover, Roy argued, “these young women have, everyone of them, returned to us as thoroughly and fully unsound on the question of social equality between the races as the most ardent negrophile could desire.”¹²⁷ It seems as if experiences at Blue Ridge were affecting the perspectives these young women held. Roy was incensed by these radical views, and Weatherford had to defuse the situation. To assuage the college president, Weatherford noted the center’s policy that blacks eat in private rooms at Blue Ridge.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Weatherford

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²⁵ Combs, “Race Reform,” 93-99.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹²⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 93. According to Combs, Roy thought “that YWCA programs at Blue Ridge and two other conference centers had corrupted the views of State Normal college students with regard to race issues.”

¹²⁸ Combs, “Race Reform,” 96.

moved on to defend the presence of blacks as speakers and guests at Blue Ridge.¹²⁹ In a letter to another Mississippi college president involving this same problem Weatherford made similar appeals. While noting that Blue Ridge did not preach “a gospel of social intermingling,” he insisted he was “glad to plead guilty to the conviction that we must treat the Negro as a human being and as Christians ought to treat him.”¹³⁰ Overall, Weatherford believed the racial stances that he and Blue Ridge took at this time were as liberal as the conference center could make and still keep its doors open. To go further, would have alienated a number of southern colleges and created controversy.¹³¹ Weatherford did not want to jeopardize losing Blue Ridge’s support and students. Eventually this issue subsided. Yet, it demonstrates that despite Blue Ridge’s unwillingness to officially integrate and challenge structural racism, it was chipping away at the system. It was a place that more conservative southerners saw as dangerous to the southern racial status quo. Indeed, Blue Ridge seemed “unsafe” in the eyes of people like Roy.

Experiences at Blue Ridge not only changed perspectives but also influenced how some of its participants responded to racism and chose to spend their lives. Kester claimed that the leader of the Louisiana delegation—one of the groups that had threatened to walk out on Carver’s 1924 Blue Ridge speech—later tried to prevent a lynching in Louisiana.¹³² Kester implies that Blue Ridge had been a pivotal experience in this man’s life, thus explaining this bold action. While it is unclear how much Carver’s

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹³⁰ W. D. Weatherford to Joe Cook, May 25, 1928, folder 937, Weatherford Papers.

¹³¹ Indeed, at this time a number of Louisiana colleges (that had been attending Hollister—another Y summer conference retreat in Missouri) had already chosen to end their association with that center because “colored delegates . . . were housed in the same dormitories as the white delegates.” See D. B. Raulins to W. D. Weatherford, January 6, 1928, folder 781, Weatherford Papers.

¹³² Kester, “Radical Prophets,” 24.

visit affected that Louisianan, it is obvious the scientist's visit made a deep impact on the life's work of Jim Hardwick and Howard Kester. Hardwick became a YMCA secretary and continued working in race relations. In the 1930s he and Carver traveled throughout the South as the latter spoke to white college groups.¹³³ Hardwick set up meetings and secured accommodations in this process. After Carver's death in 1943, the historical record becomes silent on Hardwick's career. Howard Kester became even more active than Hardwick in the years after meeting Carver. Kester developed into a true radical on racial, religious, and economic matters.¹³⁴ In 1926, after spending several weeks with Carver at Tuskegee, he attempted to create the George Washington Carver Fellowship, whose purpose was

to unite all kindred spirits, whatever race, religion or nationality, who behold in the universe the most sublime expression of Love, Truth and Beauty, through which the Great Creator eternally speaks concerning the things that He has created.¹³⁵

That same year Kester would declare that Carver was "the man who has been and is to this day the greatest inspiration in my life."¹³⁶ While the Carver Fellowship never materialized, Kester did embark on a career of service participating in progressive racial and economic organizations such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Committee on Economic and Racial Justice, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, and the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. In 1937 Kester would write: "One of the significant moments in

¹³³ See Edwards's chapter "The Trailblazer," in *Carver of Tuskegee*, 173–186.

¹³⁴ For in-depth analysis of Kester see John Egerton, *A Mind to Stay Here: Profiles from the South* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970), 70–91; John Stark Bellamy, "If Christ Came to Dixie: The Southern Prophetic Vision of Howard Anderson Kester, 1904–1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1977); Robert F. Martin, "A Prophet's Pilgrimage: The Religious Radicalism of Howard Anderson Kester, 1921–1941" *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November 1982): 511–30; and Martin, *Howard Kester*. For an overview of Kester's career, and his personal reflections on it, see Kester, "Radical Prophets."

¹³⁵ Quoted in Martin, *Howard Kester*, 170.

¹³⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*

my life occurred when I met Dr. George Washington Carver. . . . I have spent hundreds of invaluable hours with this great but simple man who opened to me new vistas of a more abundant life here in the South.”¹³⁷ Kester ended his career as a college professor teaching history and geography at Montreat-Anderson College.¹³⁸ Ironically, he had traveled full circle, as the school was near the town of Black Mountain. Kester had spent his life actively working to create a more just society by challenging the structures of racism.

In the 1930s a subtle shift in how Blue Ridge dealt with accommodating African Americans began. Until this time, the two major issues had been where black guests would stay at the center and with whom would they eat. However, it was the dining question that remained at the forefront because the idea of blacks and whites sharing rooms was completely out of question. The public nature of eating—because it took place in the presence of large numbers of people and could cause controversy—made complying with this custom such a critical concern. Nevertheless, due to a number of changes occurring at Blue Ridge in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this would gradually become less of an issue by the end of the decade.

Finances proved to be one of the chief reasons for this change. Through the mid-1920s, Blue Ridge was a very well-attended conference center, attracting many gatherings and large groups, with over 4300 people visiting the grounds in 1925.¹³⁹ However, this success would be partially responsible for the center’s future financial troubles. Because Blue Ridge was such a popular retreat, the growing crowds had

¹³⁷ Howard Kester, “Early Life of Howard Kester,” p. 4, folder 235, Howard Anderson Kester Papers #3834, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

¹³⁸ Martin, *Howard Kester*, 153.

¹³⁹ Robert B. Eleazer, “Blue Ridge, 1925,” *The Blue Ridge Voice*, October, 1925, 1.

necessitated more buildings and facilities in order to accommodate them. In 1922, Blue Ridge leaders began selling bonds (backed by the Blue Ridge property) to cover these costs.¹⁴⁰ The debts accumulated from these bonds and the building campaigns would eventually become an albatross around their necks as conference numbers declined.

Through the 1910s and 1920s Weatherford tried a number of ventures in order to publicize Blue Ridge and address the institution's financial issues. Earliest among these was the *Blue Ridge Voice*, which began running in 1919 and featured Blue Ridge events, pictures, and printed copies of speeches made at the center. However, this magazine proved to cost more than it was worth. As a result, when cost-cutting measures were instituted, this publication was discontinued in 1927.¹⁴¹ Another endeavor, the Southern College YMCA (SCY) Camp, created in 1923, was a summer boy's camp operated on the grounds of Blue Ridge.¹⁴² It ran for almost a decade before being scraped.¹⁴³ One of the major reasons Blue Ridge struggled financially throughout this period was that it was officially operated only in the summers. Thus, it depended on the income from these few months to provide for the place's year-round upkeep. With a conference center that had numerous buildings, and one located in the mountains where pipes freezing in the winters always remained a problem, maintenance was an expensive proposition. Finding a way to rent out the Blue Ridge facility in the fall, winter, and spring was critically needed. In

¹⁴⁰ See advertisement "A High-Grade Seven Per Cent Investment Offered by the Blue Ridge Association, \$80,000 First Mortgage Bonds," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, February, 1922, 18. More importantly, Blue Ridge secured another \$160,000 in bonds in 1928 from the Nashville Trust Company and Walter H. Gill, Trustees against their Blue Ridge property. It seems that Blue Ridge must have consolidated the earlier \$80,000 bond issue into this 1928 agreement. See Robert R. Williams (Asheville, NC, attorney representing Blue Ridge) to W. D. Weatherford, November 6, 1933, folder 1767, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴¹ Weatherford to F. C. Abbott, August 17, 1927, folder 513, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴² "The Boy and His Summer," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, April 1923, 11.

¹⁴³ The camp operated until 1932. After that there are no records of its existence. For the last record of SCY Camp see folder 1648, "Blue Ridge Association, 1932: SCY Camp," Weatherford Papers.

the fall of 1926 Weatherford initiated a new undertaking to meet this challenge, opening the Lee School for Boys.¹⁴⁴ Primarily a boarding school, the institution was centered on a classical education and designed to emphasize character, citizenship, and religion. However, it too proved unsuccessful. After three years of operation it had accumulated a debt of \$41,668.56.¹⁴⁵ By 1929 disputes over J. A. Peoples' (the school's headmaster) role had led to his being dismissed from the faculty, and relations between him and Weatherford became nasty.¹⁴⁶ With low morale among its faculty and continuing financial troubles, the school closed in the spring of 1931.¹⁴⁷ The failure of these projects, along with the center's mounting indebtedness and the general economic climate of the country due to the Great Depression, all contributed to Blue Ridge's serious financial troubles.

Besides the strain of Blue Ridge, Weatherford himself had a number of other personal and professional pressures weighting on him at this time. Serving as the President of the YMCA Graduate School and being that school's chief development officer was no easy feat as philanthropic bequests to that institution became more difficult to secure. Also taxing his physical and emotional well-being was the critical health of his second wife. After nearly seven years as a widower, Weatherford had remarried on May 27, 1914, to Julia Pearl McCrory.¹⁴⁸ The two met when McCrory—then a YWCA secretary at Winthrop College, South Carolina—came to work at Blue

¹⁴⁴ W. D. Weatherford, "The Lee School for Boys," *The Blue Ridge Voice*, November 1925, p.1, 10.

¹⁴⁵ See "Report of the Fact Finding and Agenda Committee," p. 5, folder 1149, Weatherford papers.

¹⁴⁶ J. A. Peoples to Weatherford, November 19, 1929, folder 961, Weatherford Papers. In this letter Peoples wrote "I wish to say to you that I feel that this whole transaction reflects less discredit on me than on you" and he noted Weatherford's "domineering egotism."

¹⁴⁷ "Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Executive Committee of the Blue Ridge Association, Lee Hall, September 7, 1931," folder 1347, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁸ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 91.

Ridge in the summer of 1912.¹⁴⁹ Weatherford's new bride was fifteen years his junior, and by 1916 they had their first and only child, Willis, Jr.¹⁵⁰ However sometime in 1925 she had developed a respiratory illness. Eventually diagnosed as pleurisy, Julia left Nashville to go to a sanatorium in Colorado.¹⁵¹ With her separated from Weatherford and their son, it was a trying time. Her illness and health care expenses also placed a heavy weight on Weatherford's personal finances.¹⁵²

All of these pressures reached a peak when Weatherford offered his resignation as President of the Blue Ridge Board of Directors on the last day of 1929.¹⁵³ Noting his twenty-two years of continuous service, he wrote "the time has come when someone else should take this load and serve the South through this institution."¹⁵⁴ Weatherford outlined several reasons for his decision, noting the growing demands for his time from the YMCA Graduate School and the dissatisfaction by some Blue Ridge supporters of the present leadership.¹⁵⁵ However, apparently Weatherford's request was not granted, and he continued in his role at Blue Ridge until 1944.

Yet even though Weatherford stayed at Blue Ridge, the institution's financial resources continued to remain strained in this period. In 1930, with the Great Depression

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 88–89.

¹⁵⁰ McCrory was born in 1890. See Photo Album, "An Album of Julia Pearl McCrory Weatherford," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

¹⁵¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 156. It is unclear of the exact dates and for how long she stayed in Colorado. However, she was there for periods in 1926 and 1927. See R. H. King letter, March 10, 1927, folder 3113, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵² It appears Weatherford had to ask for loans from some of his friends to help him pay for the costs of his wife's care. One of these gifts (\$1000) apparently came from YMCA leader and personal friend John R. Mott. See R.H. King to Weatherford, June 14, 1926, folder 3095, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵³ Weatherford to P. S. Gilchrist, December 31, 1929, folder 950, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

setting in, the attendance at Blue Ridge dipped below 1400.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Blue Ridge's struggles mirrored a similar trend among other Association centers across the country.¹⁵⁷ Weatherford attributed their problems to the growth in denominational conference grounds (which took significant numbers of their former clientele), as well as trends in modern life. Particularly he highlighted the role the radio and the automobile were playing, the former making it easier to hear "outstanding speakers of the country without going to Conference Grounds," and the latter allowing people "to travel far and wide."¹⁵⁸ While Weatherford perhaps did not recognize it, also contributing significantly to the center's troubles in these years was the collegiate YMCA's decline as an organization in this period.¹⁵⁹ In short, this was a tough time for anyone to operate a Y meeting place.

By 1932 the situation at Blue Ridge was getting desperate. In January of that year the treasury had no funds, and creditors were demanding payment from the institution.¹⁶⁰ In this critical time, Weatherford even paid one bill out of his personal funds to keep the center afloat.¹⁶¹ However, the most pressing concern for the center was the \$160,000 bond indebtedness it carried. As these bonds came due in 1933, Blue Ridge had no way of paying them. By August of that year, the bondholders made moves to foreclose on the

¹⁵⁶ "Approximate Numbers of Blue Ridge Conferences, Summer 1930," folder 1148, Weatherford Papers. It appears other YMCA conference centers were experiencing similar declines in this period. Between 1925 and 1929, the number of paying guest days at the YMCA camp at Silver Bay, New York had dropped from 44,000 to 29,000, while at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin they had dropped from 42,000 to 32,000. In this period Blue Ridge had dropped from 32,000 to 22,000 paying guest days. See Weatherford to P. S. Gilchrist, December 31, 1929, folder 950, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁷ W. D. Weatherford to E. J. Fuller, November 7, 1929, folder 948, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ David P. Setran, *The College "Y": Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4–5.

¹⁶⁰ W. D. Weatherford to Phillips-Buttorff Mfg. Co., January 5, 1932, folder 1614, Weatherford Papers. See also other examples of debts in 1932 "Creditors" folder 1614, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶¹ Weatherford to Phillips-Buttorff Mfg. Co., January 5, 1932, folder 1614, Weatherford Papers.

Blue Ridge property.¹⁶² With Blue Ridge's impending failure, Weatherford worked with the YMCA Graduate School board of directors to purchase the property. In the end, through a complicated legal arrangement, the Y institution in Nashville acquired the Blue Ridge for approximately \$70,000 by paying the bondholders a portion of the bond's worth.¹⁶³

After the transaction had taken place at the end of 1933, the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training went out of existence and was replaced by a new institution. Several months earlier, Weatherford, H. W. Sanders, and J. J. Ray had received a charter for an organization—the Blue Ridge College, Incorporated.¹⁶⁴ They had made this move as part of the deal to transfer the Blue Ridge property to the YMCA Graduate School. While the Blue Ridge College was in effect a separate organization from the YMCA Graduate School, the latter's purchase of the Blue Ridge bonds made the existence of this new corporation possible. Basically, the former Blue Ridge Association was retired—along with its existing debts—and this new institution (Blue Ridge College) began with a clean slate. Through Weatherford and the Blue Ridge Association's skillful and somewhat questionable maneuvers, Blue Ridge had

¹⁶² W. D. Weatherford to "The YMCA Graduate School Board Members," August 21, 1933, folder 1693, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶³ W. D. Weatherford to R. R. Williams, December 26, 1933, folder 1767, Weatherford Papers. In this letter Weatherford notes he paid \$47,500 to the bond holders. Therefore, the YMCA Graduate School must have paid only a percentage of the actual value of these bonds. Since the bondholders probably felt this was the best way to recoup any of their investment in the midst of the Depression, they took this offer. See also W. D. Weatherford letter, January 6, 1934, folder 1694, Weatherford Papers. In this mass letter Weatherford notes the property would cost exactly \$69,749.75 and "there will probably be an additional expense of \$300 for transfer of titles and other items we cannot now foresee." It is not clear exactly what the additional cost was that brought the cost from \$47,500—which was paid to the bondholders—up to the final cost of \$69,749.75.

¹⁶⁴ See Raleigh *News and Observer*, August 17, 1933, newspaper clip, folder 1771, Weatherford Papers.

been saved.¹⁶⁵ The reason that these proceedings were “somewhat questionable” is due to the fact that neither the YMCA Graduate School nor the new Blue Ridge College would be responsible for paying any outstanding debts, even though the leadership of the new Blue Ridge College was essentially the same as that of the old Blue Ridge Association. This change had taken place through a legal slight of hand.

In the midst of this alteration, Weatherford had also found a solution to the previously vexing problem of securing revenue from Blue Ridge’s off season. A new college was seeking suitable facilities for its educational program in the summer of 1933 and found Blue Ridge to be an appealing place. Black Mountain College, as this new institution would come to be known, carried on negotiations with Weatherford in that period and secured a lease of the Blue Ridge grounds for the fall and spring semesters of 1933.¹⁶⁶ Designed as an arts school, it proved to be an unusually innovative and progressive institution for the region and for the country. It would operate without a president or a credit system for its students and also lack the usual designation of the four undergraduate years.

Black Mountain began its existence with some controversy, as it was started by several ex-faculty members from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida.¹⁶⁷ Chief among the new school’s organizers was John Andrew Rice—Rollins’ classics professor.

¹⁶⁵ Weatherford was fully aware that this legal transaction would not result in the new corporation having any responsibility for the Blue Ridge Association’s previous debts since he had consulted his lawyer about the liabilities of the YMCA Graduate School in making this move. See Robert R. Williams to W. D. Weatherford, November 6, 1933, folder 1767, Weatherford Papers. While the ethics of this action may have been questionable it appears Weatherford stayed within the law. His willingness to take such steps showed his deep commitment to Blue Ridge.

¹⁶⁶ W. D. Weatherford to F. R. Georgia, July 7, 1933, Folder 1791, Weatherford Papers. See also “Coeducation in a New College,” *New York Times*, newspaper clip, folder 1789, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶⁷ “Coeducation in a New College,” *New York Times*, newspaper clip, folder 1789, Weatherford Papers. See also Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: Dutton, 1972).

Rice had been dismissed from the Rollins because it was claimed he had been “disruptive of peace and harmony” there.¹⁶⁸ These supposed disturbances had included his calling “a chisel one of the world’s most beautiful objects, whisper[ing] in chapel,” and putting “‘obscene’ pictures on the walls of his classroom.”¹⁶⁹ Rice appealed his case to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) , and a Johns Hopkins University philosophy professor, Arthur O. Lovejoy, headed south to lead an inquiry into Rice’s termination. By the time this investigation officially “vindicat[ed]” Rice, the classics professor had already moved on with his plans for Black Mountain College.¹⁷⁰ As talks between Blue Ridge and Black Mountain progressed in the summer of 1933, Rice’s iconoclastic style, and the liberal perspective of the school’s other faculty, raised some questions from Blue Ridge’s Christian leadership. The two cultural perspectives of the institutions—one modern, the other Victorian—were at odds. While Blue Ridge certainly needed tenants and the revenue they could provide, it was also important that suitable renters—whose values did not offend the property’s owners and visitors—be found. As a result, Weatherford felt it important when Lovejoy assured him “ ‘that no complain[t]s on moral grounds have been sustained’ against any of the former members of the Rollins College faculty now at Black Mountain.”¹⁷¹ With these assurances, Black Mountain College began its association with Blue Ridge, renting the facilities for \$4500 a year.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 19.

¹⁶⁹ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19, 27.

¹⁷¹ Arthur O. Lovejoy to W. D. Weatherford, October 29, 1933, folder 3235, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷² Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 31.

Nevertheless, even with this new revenue, Blue Ridge continued to struggle financially through the 1930s and early 1940s. The Great Depression continued to lead to lower attendance rates, and as the United States became involved in World War II, rationing also adversely affected the conference center. Not surprisingly, over time the relationship between Black Mountain College and Blue Ridge began to sour. Disputes over the upkeep of Blue Ridge as well as debates about the property's rental cost developed. Moreover, there remained a philosophical division. Black Mountain College had no religious foundation underlying its mission, and this fact increasingly put the group in conflict with Blue Ridge. In 1938 Weatherford noted his opinion about the college, writing "they are not at all a satisfactory tenant. Their ideals are not our ideals; they have no interest in religion and their conception of human values are certainly not our conception."¹⁷³ Black Mountain College's progressive and unorthodox teaching style even created further financial issues for Blue Ridge. As fundraisers worked to gain money for the center, Black Mountain College's association with the former was harmful at times. Some donors even became confused about the relationship between the two institutions as it became rumored "that the Blue Ridge property ha[d] been sold to a bunch of Atheists from Florida."¹⁷⁴ One prospective contributor thought Black Mountain College was "teaching paganism nine months and that Blue Ridge was teaching Christianity three."¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, these troubles did not last long for Blue Ridge, as the connection between the institutions would cease in the spring of 1940. At that time Black Mountain would move into their new campus at nearby Lake Eden.

¹⁷³ W. D. Weatherford to E. G. Wilson, October 12, 1938, folder 2466, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷⁴ C. J. Jackson to R. C. Bell, October 7, 1939, folder 2586, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷⁵ C. J. Jackson to W. D. Weatherford, December 9, 1940, folder 2794, Weatherford Papers.

As Black Mountain College made plans to leave, Weatherford sought other options to gain revenue in these financially scraped times. He tried to create a young women's preparatory school—Cragmore School for Girls—yet this academy would never materialize.¹⁷⁶ In 1941 Weatherford explored leasing out the facility to the government in this period of war, approaching Will Alexander who was working for the federal government in Washington, D.C.¹⁷⁷ However, this plan also did not work out. In 1942 the summer proved to be “a very, very poor season” as business dropped considerably and the center ran a deficit of \$4,000.¹⁷⁸ Gas and rubber rationing, in particular, were affecting Blue Ridge as it became difficult for people to drive and take summer vacations. By January 1943 creditors were pressing Blue Ridge for overdue payments, and Weatherford was forced to begin cutting timber off the property.¹⁷⁹ At this time, Blue Ridge was also carrying \$60,000 in bonded indebtedness.¹⁸⁰ With all of these complications to consider, Weatherford was once again faced with the conundrum of saving Blue Ridge.

One of the alternatives was to sell the property to the YMCAs of the Southern Region.¹⁸¹ In the fall of 1943 the YMCAs of the ten southeastern states chartered a new organization—the Blue Ridge Assembly.¹⁸² This group was formed to raise money from

¹⁷⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Will Alexander, April 8, 1941, folder 2818, Weatherford Papers. See also folders 2835–2842, Weatherford Papers, for the Cragmore planning efforts.

¹⁷⁷ Weatherford to Alexander, April 8, 1941, folder 2818, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷⁸ W. D. Weatherford to Southern Bell Telephone Co., October 12, 1942, folder 2894, Weatherford Papers and W. D. Weatherford to Mary Smiley, February 23, 1943, folder 2980, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷⁹ W. D. Weatherford to F. C. Abbott, January 7, 1943, folder 2892, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford noted that “We haven’t cut any timber off the Blue Ridge grounds for thirty-five years.”

¹⁸⁰ W. D. Weatherford to E. S. Lotspeich, May 24, 1943, folder 2973, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² T. Walker Lewis to W. D. Weatherford, December 6, 1943, folder 2989, Weatherford Papers. These states included: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

the southern YMCAs to pay off Blue Ridge's debt.¹⁸³ In return, Weatherford and the Blue Ridge College board would turn over the property to this new body.¹⁸⁴ This move would also end Weatherford's official leadership of Blue Ridge. Thus, beginning in 1944 the Blue Ridge Assembly took over the management and control of the conference center and the burden of its debts.¹⁸⁵ By November 6, 1945, the Blue Ridge property was officially in the hands of the Blue Ridge Assembly with a board composed of thirty-nine laymen and YMCA secretaries from the ten southern states.¹⁸⁶ The burden of Blue Ridge had finally been lifted from Weatherford's shoulders.

Several years prior to Weatherford's breaking ties with Blue Ridge, an official from within the national YMCA had been critical of Weatherford's handling of racial issues at the center. At that time, while the center still remained racially liberal in the context of the South, another YMCA conference center—Hollister—had begun instituting more progressive racial policies. This camp, located near Branson, Missouri, served as the meeting place for the YMCAs and YWCAs of the Southwest region.¹⁸⁷ In the summer of 1934, Sherwood Eddy wrote Weatherford, noting that in his recent trip to Hollister that that region showed

more remarkable progress than any other that I know of in the Student Movement, - culturally, spiritually, and, most remarkable of all, in race relations. There every

¹⁸³ See the following issues of "Blue Ridge Voice: Progress to Campaign to secure \$150,000 to Purchase, Remodel, and Begin Operating Blue Ridge," December 29, 1943; February 17, 1944; and June 30, 1944; folder 3790, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Morristown Bank, January 22, 1944, folder 3788, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁵ See W. D. Weatherford to Member of the Board of Directors of Blue Ridge College, Inc., June 28, 1944, folder 3790 and W. D. Weatherford to A. J. Elliott, September 19, 1945, folder 3791, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁶ "YMCA's Purchase Blue Ridge Property," November 6, 1945, Folder 3792, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁷ Begun in 1910, Hollister was located just south of Branson, Missouri. See Aaron K. Ketchell, *Holy Hills of the Ozarks: Religion and Tourism in Branson, Missouri* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 23.

year where white and colored student delegations share the same tables and the same cabins, and there is at least one colored leader of groups, they seem to be solving the race problem better than in any area I know of in America or South Africa.¹⁸⁸

Eddy told Weatherford “When I asked the colored students how things were at Blue Ridge, they said that they would never go Blue Ridge until they were treated right.”¹⁸⁹

Eddy, noting his long admiration and friendship with Weatherford, and recognizing Weatherford had “been one of the outstanding leaders in our country in the matter of race relations,” went on to chide his racial policy at Blue Ridge. In the end Eddy insisted he thought Weatherford had the opportunity to “do more to advance race relations just now than any man in North America.”¹⁹⁰

Despite his friend’s criticism, Weatherford continued to move cautiously on this issue, particularly in his concern to comply with North Carolina segregation laws. Specifically, Jim Crow codes requiring separate bathrooms for blacks and whites proved to be a major obstacle Weatherford encountered in constructing Blue Ridge’s racial policies. From the 1920s forward, Weatherford struggled to act in accordance with state laws while also not “embarrassing” African American visitors. The complexity of this issue was outlined as Weatherford wrote to a YWCA official who was considering holding an interracial conference at Blue Ridge in 1936. Weatherford noted

The North Carolina law requires that all public places shall furnish separate toilets and baths for white and colored people. This means that in order to meet the law, I must put at the disposal of your conference four separate toilets and baths. If it is an ‘open meeting’ or so-called ‘public,’ my lawyer tells me we must put the sign ‘white and colored’ on the bath room doors. On the other hand, he informs me that if it is a ‘closed’ or ‘private’ group, we would not have to put these signs

¹⁸⁸ Sherwood Eddy to W. D. Weatherford, June 10, 1934, folder 1880, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

up but we must have a sufficient number of baths and toilets to meet the separate needs.¹⁹¹

In this case, Weatherford tried to follow the law while also not posting Jim Crow signs that would humiliate the center's black visitors. As noted before, he did not believe that challenging the law was the best approach to bringing change.

While one might argue Weatherford was simply hiding behind the law in order to mask his own racist beliefs, the evidence does not bear this out. It seems clear that he thought it perfectly fine to have black guests and that they should not be discriminated against and made to feel unwelcome. In the summer of 1932, Abel Gregg of the National Council of the YMCA in New York wrote Weatherford commending him and Blue Ridge for allowing "our Negro delegates in the company without any discrimination."¹⁹² Gregg went on to say he had also experienced a "chuckle" over "the Negro and white man occupying the same room" and Weatherford's objection to it.¹⁹³ Weatherford responded that his concern had been that if this had been known in the South it would have "very likely give[n] us very great difficulty."¹⁹⁴ Weatherford further noted "while I believe in being fair, I do not believe in being foolish."¹⁹⁵ Weatherford clearly knew that providing fair treatment to blacks was right. Yet he was not willing to openly challenge the structures in society causing discrimination against blacks. While he likely recognized this larger system lay at the root of the problem, it never was his way to

¹⁹¹ W. D. Weatherford to Mary Jane Willett, March 31, 1936, folder 2238, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹² Abel Gregg to W. D. Weatherford, June 18, 1932, folder 1624a, Weatherford Papers. The reason that Blue Ridge had been allowed to be so open to black guests on this occasion seems due to the fact that the grounds had largely been empty at this time, and there was no one else in the building in which this conference stayed. Thus, there was no one outside the conference to see that southern racial norms had been broken and to raise complaint. See W. D. Weatherford to Abel Gregg, June 21, 1932, folder 1624a, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹³ Gregg to Weatherford, folder 1624a, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁴ Weatherford to Gregg, June 21, 1932, folder 1624a, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

concentrate on changing that foundation. He worked to make improvements through different channels—principally through changing the perspectives of young people and calling Christians to see their duty to respect all individuals, regardless of race.

As Weatherford encountered legal questions concerning segregation, he repeatedly sought advice from his lawyer regarding the exact requirements of the law. In January of 1936 Weatherford contacted his counsel about the legality of “a young colored woman occupying the dormitories along with the white women” at an upcoming conference.¹⁹⁶ Robert Williams, his attorney, responded that “While I do not find any criminal law making you criminally responsible. . . I find so many constitutional and statutory provisions relating to other phases of the race question that I do not think it advisable for you to adopt such a policy.”¹⁹⁷ Weatherford took this advice and made it the Blue Ridge policy to house African Americans in their own rooms with private baths to comply with the law. In future instances where African Americans came to the center, he would return to Williams’s guidance to defend his handling of the issue.¹⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Weatherford clearly recognized that Blue Ridge needed to maintain a full conference schedule with large groups to keep its balance sheet out of the red. This pressure caused him and the Blue Ridge leadership to gradually relax aspects of their racial policy in the mid-1930s and accept African Americans on the basis of less

¹⁹⁶ R. R. Williams to W. D. Weatherford, February 4, 1936, folder 2261, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ For examples see W. D. Weatherford to Ed. S. King, Harry F. Comer, and Mary Jane Willett, March 18, 1936, folder 2217, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Gren O. Pierrel, February 18, 1938, folder 2517, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to W. Norman Cook, March 1, 1940, folder 2743, Weatherford Papers. In 1939 Weatherford also sought the advice of Frank Porter Graham—president of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—when he was considering allowing black students to participate in a training conference for the presidents of college YMCAs. Weatherford noted “he tells me that the State constitution has a provision that white and colored students must be educated in separate institutions so we have a very decidedly difficult situation there.” See W. D. Weatherford to Student Secretaries in South, December 5, 1939, folder 2660, Weatherford Papers.

discrimination than in earlier periods. In the winter of 1936, Weatherford wrote his lawyer about an upcoming conference studying “future social problems of the south” that wanted to include African American participants, adding “They will not come if they cannot permit these speakers to sit down in the main dining room.”¹⁹⁹ Weatherford appealed to Williams’s legal advice, writing: “I will be glad to have you counsel me carefully about this—for as you see to give up these conferences would probably cost us several thousand dollars, and you know we cannot afford that loss. On the other hand we must of course obey the letter of the law.” Ironically, whereas in Blue Ridge’s earlier years Weatherford had been very timid on race because he feared controversy and the loss of white financial support, he now considered expanding the center’s rules because he realized too conservative of an approach might cost them business.

By the late 1930s Blue Ridge’s eating policy had visibly loosened. African Americans and whites could eat together—as long it was posted in pre-conference bulletins and materials—in the main dining hall, and this practice seems not to have raised the same level of controversy as it had in 1926 with Mordecai Johnson.²⁰⁰ In 1938 a YMCA secretary from Providence, Rhode Island, Gren O. Pierrel, wrote to Weatherford inquiring about this question, admitting that he understood the issue’s complexity.²⁰¹ Pierrel noted that he would understand if black delegates could not be accommodated because in his own association “we have not found it possible to mingle

¹⁹⁹ W. D. Weatherford to R. R. Williams, (no date—but in folder dated 1936), folder 2261, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁰ In 1936 a committee of the Southern YMCA and YWCA regional councils had been set up to examine the history of the Blue Ridge/Kings Mountain “race history.” Responding to the request of one of the committee members (on the bottom of this request letter in his own handwriting) Weatherford noted that for “some years” African Americans ate in the main dining room “on the condition that conference printed material has carried the simple statement ‘there will be fraternal Negro delegates entertained as others guests.’” See W. W. McKee to W. D. Weatherford, October 5, 1936, folder 2351, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰¹ Gren O. Pierrel to W. D. Weatherford, February 10, 1938, folder 2517, Weatherford Papers.

the white and the colored men together in our membership” or “for them to have full freedom of our dining room.”²⁰² Weatherford responded, “We can handle this without any difficulty whatever.”²⁰³ However, he added that one “precaution” needed to be taken.²⁰⁴ Weatherford insisted “A statement should be sent to the general secretaries of the South saying that the conference would have a few colored secretaries who would be treated as any other delegates.”²⁰⁵ This new policy showed a shift in how Blue Ridge and Weatherford dealt with the eating issue. Whereas in earlier times, blacks had been kept away because it might offend whites there, now if potential white participants read the program’s announcement that black delegates would be treated as equals and could not deal with these new standards, then these whites would have to stay home. By 1939, the “regular policy” was to allow black delegates to sit with “the Conference to which they belong.”²⁰⁶ Gradually, an opening on the eating question had developed.

Despite the progress made on the dining issue, it is still important to note that Blue Ridge’s racial guidelines would only relax up to a point. While the conference center might flout southern customs, it refused to challenge the law. In particular, it did not budge on allowing blacks and whites to share rooms at the conference center. From the perspective of Weatherford and the Blue Ridge leadership, they thought their methods of handling the issue of race to be advanced for the time in the South. Also from their

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ W. D. Weatherford to Gren O. Pierrel, February 18, 1938, folder 2517, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Jesse F. Bader, August 18, 1939, folder 2744, Weatherford Papers. However while black guests could sit with white guests of their conference it still remained an issue that attendees from other conferences might object to this practice. Therefore, on at least one occasion Weatherford arranged to have screens placed in the main dining hall to separate different conferences so that there would be no complaints. See W. D. Weatherford to Herbert Sanders, April 29, 1941, folder 2849, Weatherford Papers.

angle, they saw no problem with skirting the North Carolina separate bathroom law for blacks and whites by putting all African Americans in rooms with baths. Even though blacks were receiving different treatment than whites were, Blue Ridge officials did not consider this to be discrimination. Thus Weatherford and Blue Ridge became frustrated when other groups pressed them to go further in the mid 1930s.

This disconnect between the Blue Ridge leadership and some groups became very clear in 1936 as the leadership of National Student Council of the YWCA was planning an interracial gathering and considering Blue Ridge as a possible site. After corresponding with Weatherford, they were under the assumption that African American participants at that upcoming seminar would not experience any discrimination, and that black and white secretaries could room together if they so chose.²⁰⁷ However, after Helen Morton—one of the organizers of this conference—went to Blue Ridge and reviewed the upcoming arrangements, Weatherford told her that she was mistaken, “that there would be no variation from the single rooming clause.”²⁰⁸ In a letter where Morton wrote to those involved in this event’s planning, she outlined her meeting with Weatherford and clearly provided both perspectives on the issue:

As he sees it, there is no discrimination where everyone occupies a single room at double room rates. As we see it, wherever special arrangements have to be made because of the presence of Negro staff members, no matter how desirable these arrangements may be, discrimination does exist.²⁰⁹

This YWCA group did not meet at Blue Ridge that year. Morton went on to comment that it had been “a serious mistake to have chosen North Carolina for a national meeting”

²⁰⁷ Helen Morton to “Those of you who have been asking about the interracial arrangement at the Student Staff Seminar at Blue Ridge,” June 23, 1936, folder 2219, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

and that she feared “We stand to lose whatever trust we may have built up over the years from our Negro and white constituency in maintaining a non-discriminatory standard for our national meetings . . .”²¹⁰ Obviously Weatherford and Morton were coming to this issue with two different concerns. Morton thought about this event in terms of maintaining the goodwill and faith between blacks and whites in the YWCA that had slowly and carefully been built over the past years. Weatherford was concerned with this as well, but his first interest lay in preserving his institution and making sure it was not put at risk because it broke North Carolina law.

Even though Morton’s YWCA group did not find Blue Ridge’s racial policy satisfactory, it is important to understand the context Weatherford was working in by recognizing that at this same time there were whites in the Deep South who viewed Blue Ridge as extreme. In the fall of 1937 a series of editorials ran in *The Mississippian*—the University of Mississippi’s student newspaper—regarding the “radical” nature of Blue Ridge and Weatherford.²¹¹ Dave Hamilton, an Ole Miss graduate student, took the conference center to task for “advocating, if not practicing, the most dangerous doctrine of racial equality.”²¹² He found it especially abhorrent that students had served meals to African Americans there, noting “For an Ole Miss man or woman to wait on the table of a negro seems most repulsive to me, whether the negro be a Ph. D. or a field hand.”²¹³ Hamilton had gone on to also blast Blue Ridge for advocating pacifism. This piece in *The Mississippian* drew response, and the newspaper ran an open forum to air out further

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ See newspaper clips, folder 2802, Weatherford Papers.

²¹² Dave Hamilton, “Inter-racial Equality Preached at Blue Ridge, Hamilton Writes,” folder 2802, Weatherford Papers

²¹³ *Ibid.*

perspectives, including a rejoinder by Hamilton. J. A. Parker, a recent Blue Ridge attendee, offered a thoughtful response arguing that Weatherford's actions—while perhaps radical by Mississippi standards—nevertheless were being true to the message of Jesus' teachings and the work of the YMCA.²¹⁴ Hamilton remained incensed at the goings-on at Blue Ridge, taking on a particularly irrational tone as he wrote, "When a Mississippi student waits on the table of a negro the state itself is offended. When a negro is presented as an equal and addresses the student by his or her name on first acquaintance the honor of the entire white population of the state is at stake."²¹⁵ These editorials showed that Weatherford's fears about Blue Ridge being seen as too radical of a place were not too far misplaced. Attesting to Weatherford's long career with student YMCA work, he had a good understanding of the thoughts and feelings of white southern college students. Moreover, he understood that articles like these had the potential to smear the Blue Ridge name and result in decreased student participation at the center. With these ideas in mind, he compromised on how far he would push the center's racial policies.

The Southern Student Conferences of the YMCA and YWCA had undergone many changes since the 1920s as the Y's student movement responded to racial concerns. In truth, this faction of the Y's constituency—particularly the YWCA—proved to be the most aggressive in pushing for change on the subject of race. Until 1928, there were two separate organizing councils for white and black college students in the South.²¹⁶ Blue

²¹⁴ J. A. Parker, "Open Forum: 'Yours Received and Contents Noted'," folder 2802, Weatherford Papers.

²¹⁵ Dave Hamilton, "Open Forum: 'Yours Received and Contents Noted'," November 10, 1937, folder 2802, Weatherford Papers.

²¹⁶ See Anne Queen's 1948 unpublished Yale Divinity School seminar paper, "A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South," p. 8, folder 357, Anne Queen Papers #5214, Southern Historical

Ridge operated as the site for the white college students while Kings Mountain, North Carolina, served as the location for the African American students. As noted before, a limited number of African American students attended Blue Ridge as fraternal delegates under segregated conditions through the late 1920s.²¹⁷ However, in 1928 Kings Mountain stopped this policy of sending delegates to Blue Ridge until these visitors “could do so on the basis that other delegates attended.”²¹⁸ This practice continued through 1936 until a new relationship developed that merged the black and white councils, and for a few years the former practice of exchanging fraternal delegates resumed. Then in 1938, Kings Mountain “voted themselves out of existence” and created an interracial student conference that met at the historically black Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama.²¹⁹ Thus, two student conferences (the YWCA and YMCA had merged into one conference sometime in the early 1930s)—one for white students at Blue Ridge and an interracial one at Talladega—ran concurrently until 1942.²²⁰

Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill. Queen wrote this paper for her class “Religion in Higher Education” under Professor Clarence Shedd.

²¹⁷ Queen, “A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South,” p. 7, Queen Papers. See also Nina Mjagkij, *Light in Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852–1946* (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 112. On this page, Mjagkij notes “African Americans visiting Blue Ridge were ‘segregated and humiliated’.” She pulls this comment from Mays, *Born To Rebel*, p. 127. She actually misconstrues it somewhat. In reference to Kings Mountain’s 1928 policy Mays wrote: “We could not control what Blue Ridge did, but we could control what we did. We agreed, further, that fraternal delegates from Blue Ridge would still be welcome at Kings Mountain, and that they would never be humiliated or segregated.”

²¹⁸ Queen, “A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South,” p. 8, Queen Papers.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8-9..

²²⁰ For an example of the poster announcing the 1940 separate conferences see “Two Southern Student Christian Conferences,” oversized folder, Op-3831, Weatherford Papers. This poster listed both the Blue Ridge and Talladega conferences. It notes that Blue Ridge was “open to men and women students and faculty from white colleges in the ten southern states” while Talladega was “open to men and women students and faculty from any college—Negro or white—in the ten southern states.” Not surprisingly, Howard Kester was among the leadership of the Talladega conference.

In 1943 a new site had to be found for the YMCA/YWCA student interracial conference because Talladega College would not be operating a summer session.²²¹ Conference organizers considered several options as they searched for a new location. Weatherford weighed the pros and cons of bringing it to Blue Ridge, trying to position it in June before the white student conference.²²² By placing it early in the season, he would have avoided having many guests on the grounds and thus lessened the chance for controversy. Also at this point in the summer, he could have made the grounds “private”—thus circumventing some of the North Carolina segregation laws. Whether or not the other Blue Ridge leadership would ultimately have agreed to allow the interracial conference to meet there or not proved to be a moot point, because Blue Ridge did not operate in 1943 due to the exigencies of the Second World War.²²³ Organizers of the interracial conference then approached Black Mountain College as a possibility to see if its Lake Eden campus might offer favorable accommodations.²²⁴ Yet since this interracial conference wanted “to do away entirely with any kind of segregation,” Black Mountain College also faced the North Carolina segregation laws that had complicated Blue Ridge’s racial policies. Even this radical educational institution was hesitant to make such a move. W. R. Wunsch, rector of the college, wrote the conference organizers, noting “While I heartily disagree with segregation, I think it is the better part of wisdom to obey the law if it requires segregation, to get our freedom within the law. There is more progress to be made that way, it seems to me, than by disregarding the

²²¹ Queen, “A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South,” p. 15, Queen Papers.

²²² W. D. Weatherford to Henry Ware, February 25, 1943, folder 2979, Weatherford Papers.

²²³ W. D. Weatherford to Mrs. Aultman Sanders, April 26, 1943, folder 2964, Weatherford Papers.

²²⁴ W. R. Wunsch to W. D. Weatherford, March 3, 1943, folder 2901, Weatherford Papers.

law.”²²⁵ In the end, the conference was held from June 10 to 15 at Berea College in Kentucky.²²⁶

The Blue Ridge conference for white students and the interracial conference continued to exist separately for several more years, with the latter moving to several different locations. In 1944 the interracial conference moved to Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia.²²⁷ For the summers of 1945 and 1946 it was held at Camp Highland Lake, North Carolina, and in 1947 it met at Berea.²²⁸ In 1945 Blue Ridge had adopted a new policy outlining the procedures for entertaining African Americans at the center.²²⁹ By this time Weatherford had retired and the Blue Ridge Assembly leadership was managing the facility. This group laid down very specific guidelines that included the following provisions:

- 1) The aggregate number of such bona fide members, delegates and program participants shall not exceed five persons, or five per cent of the total number registered for such conference (whichever shall be the larger).
- 2) None of such member, delegates or program participants may bring to Blue Ridge any member of his or her family as a guest.
- 3) The laws of the State of North Carolina shall be faithfully complied with; and in order to accomplish this, any such conference shall engage in advance and pay for rooms with private baths and toilet facilities for all such negro members, delegates, and program participants.
- 4) Otherwise, there shall be no difference made or permitted as between white and negro delegates and participants in such conferences, as to accommodations and privileges provided for and extended to the members of such conferences.²³⁰

²²⁵ Wunsch to Weatherford, March 3, 1943, folder 2901, Weatherford Papers. Wunsch was appealing for Weatherford's advice on these matters and shared a portion of what he had written the organizers of the interracial conference. Weatherford responded that he "heartily" agreed with this statement. See W. D. Weatherford to W. R. Wunsch, March 4, 1943, folder 2901, Weatherford Papers.

²²⁶ Queen, "A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South," p. 16, Queen Papers.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²³⁰ "Resolution adopted by the Board of Directors of Blue Ridge Assembly, Inc. at the Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia on February 17th, 1945," folder 357, Queen Papers. See also Queen, "A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South," p. 24-25, Queen Papers.

In essence, this new policy moved Blue Ridge in a more conservative direction than it had been headed before. While the circumstances prior to this time may not have been much different than the new regulations, there had been more flexibility during Weatherford's leadership. Writing to a YMCA friend from the Midwest, Weatherford took some issue with the new administration at Blue Ridge, noting they "were not as progressive either religiously or socially as I would like to see," and he recognized but implicitly regretted the "rigid stand" they had taken "of only permitting certain numbers to be entertained at Blue Ridge."²³¹

Nevertheless, these provisions proved applicable for the YMCA/YWCA Southern Student conference only until 1948 because in that year there would no longer be two separate conferences as an inclusive group met at Berea College.²³² The leadership of the Southern Region at this time chose to officially endorse only one conference, and it was to be interracial. By 1952 Blue Ridge would change its regulations and would finally host the one, interracial, YMCA/YWCA Southern Student Conference.²³³ At this gathering Weatherford was invited to preach the Sunday sermon.

Despite Weatherford's invitation to speak at the 1952 student conference, he had not always placed his full support behind the move to make the student conference interracial. However, his reasoning reveals a key emphasis he carried throughout his

²³¹ W. D. Weatherford to A. J. Elliott, September 19, 1945, folder 3791, Weatherford Papers.

²³² Queen, "A Study of the Development of the Interracial Conference in the South," p. 1, and 28–29, Queen Papers. While there was only one "official" conference sponsored by the southern student YMCA/YWCA region, an unofficial one for whites continued in 1948 and 1949. This meeting, held at Blue Ridge, was organized primarily by students from North Carolina and South Carolina and had support from various southern states. See W. D. Weatherford, "History of the Student Young Men's Christian Association in the South," (1949), p. 49, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

²³³ Rosalie Oakes to W. D. Weatherford, January 22, 1952, folder 3807, Weatherford Papers.

life. Weatherford always placed religion over any other issue. For him, being faithful to his Christian beliefs included having a concern for social issues, specifically poverty, peace, race, and labor relations. However, his faith also included a concern for personal morality and Christian living—particularly practicing honesty, sobriety, and sexual purity. As early as 1934 he believed that the Student Movement of YMCA in North America was putting too much emphasis on the problems of “war, peace, and race relations” to the exclusion of “simple moral practices on our Campuses.”²³⁴ Weatherford noted that he was “tremendously interested” in all of those worthy issues, but he believed that the student YMCA needed to still maintain an interest in campus problems—particularly issues of personal morality such as cheating, dishonesty, and drunkenness.²³⁵ By 1939 Weatherford sensed that the leadership of the southern student movement was pushing to make the student conference at Blue Ridge into an interracial one.²³⁶ Weatherford found that frustrating—not primarily because of race and his personal views on the issue—but rather because of the implications of such an act. In a letter to Arden French, Louisiana State University YMCA secretary, he poured out his frustrations about the drive to create only an interracial student conference that would bring to Blue Ridge over a hundred African American students. Weatherford noted, “You know as well as I do that would mean that the white delegates would probably drop down to a hundred or a hundred and fifty and that we would cut the throat of Student work in the South.”²³⁷ In short, Weatherford was greatly concerned with how the emphasis on race would affect Association participation.

²³⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Samuel McCrea Cavert, June 21, 1934, folder 1867, Weatherford Papers.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Arden O. French, July 12, 1939, folder 2659, Weatherford Papers.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

These frustrations intensified in 1948 as the move was finally completed to have only one inclusive YMCA/YWCA student conference in the South. Weatherford and other YMCA leaders of his generation believed it important to have interracial meetings, but not at the cost of the whole movement.²³⁸ They felt certain some white college students would stop participating if the only option for conferences was interracial. They believed it essential to continue the all-white gatherings for these students, as well as to provide conferences that were not exclusively focusing on the issue of race. In February 1948, as debates continued within the student movement over these matters, Weatherford clearly expressed his views on the subject to his long-time friend and the North Carolina State University YMCA leader, Ed King.²³⁹ “First let me put myself squarely behind the value of interracial meetings,” Weatherford began his letter, adding “I believe they are valuable as showing the way to better understanding, and giving representatives of both groups a chance to know each other first hand.”²⁴⁰ However, he felt that these meetings would not “solve the problem of Christian Student Leadership” because there would be too much emphasis on the subject of race at these gatherings. He believed at this time a separate white conference, which would also give attention to matters of Christian leadership and campus problems, was still needed. Without it he

²³⁸ For examples see Robert G. Bell to W. D. Weatherford, February 11, 1948, folder 3799 and J. Roy Cooper, February 23, 1948, folder 3799, Weatherford Papers. Bell and Cooper were YMCA secretaries at the University of South Carolina and Clemson College, respectively. In Weatherford’s “History of the Student Young Mens Christian Association in the South”, he pointed out that the white female students who were members of the Interracial Student Council of the South particularly supported the interracial move. In the process he revealed his sexist belief that the white men were much more reasonable and pragmatic about the whole situation, noting that “the women have always taken a more absolutist position than the men on all social issues.” Weatherford, “History of the Student YMCA,” (1949), p. 48, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

²³⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Ed King, February 3, 1948, folder 3800, Weatherford Papers.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

thought “the Christian work for men in the South will suffer tremendously and in many colleges will die.”

Weatherford’s line of reasoning also reveals his deeper assumptions about interracialism. He thought about this work in terms of how it affected the perspectives of whites and blacks alike and improved their relationships. He did not argue from the position that it was simply fair and right for both groups to be able to meet together. Perhaps growing up in a world where Jim Crow had always been the norm made it difficult for Weatherford to think any other way.

For those who supported interracial student conferences, there were essentially two perspectives, a gradualist and a progressive position. For white YMCA leaders like Weatherford who mildly backed these meetings, they believed compromise was needed to keep moving forward and making progress. One day the white South would be ready for interracial student conferences. Yet at the present time they feared that moving too quickly would result in many white southern college students ceasing their participation in these conferences and perhaps even their Y involvement. The gradualists also felt race—while important—was becoming the primary issue in the student movement at the expense of attention to Christian leadership and personal morality. However, the other group—primarily African Americans and younger Y students and leaders—believed equality was the most pressing issue at the time. Compromise had moved things along too slowly. From their view, these gradualist policies had been going on for generations, with few results to show for all the work. They were ready for real change. The possibility that some students would be alienated from the Y movement because the progressives pressed ahead was not their major concern. In their minds, principle

trumped practicality. Gradualism, for those in Weatherford's group, proved much easier to rationalize because they were not black and did not experience discrimination.

In accessing Blue Ridge's interracial work, it is important to recognize both the center's limitations and its achievements. While Blue Ridge never advocated complete integration or "social equality," by providing a forum for discussing race relations, this latter purpose put the former principle at risk. Indeed, once African Americans were allowed at the center, a host of "problems" were faced. Specifically, accommodating and feeding these guests proved complex within the context of southern racial etiquette and North Carolina law. Weatherford and the leadership of Blue Ridge walked a fine line between holding to their belief in improving race relations yet not pushing too hard and alienating support necessary for the institution's survival. In a 1925 letter Weatherford revealed this struggle. Writing about the "Negro problem," he expressed his frustration at "militant Negro leaders" who believed the "only way to get their rights [was] to fight for them."²⁴¹ Weatherford continued:

I confess I have some sympathy for those who feel this way, and yet I think they are probably in danger of defeating their own purposes. . . . Of course, a man like Du Bois hopes that by their militant tactics they may reach their goal earlier, but in my own judgment they may not reach it at all along this line.²⁴²

In essence, Blue Ridge's gradualist approach to race relations reflected the attitude of Weatherford. Like most white liberals, Weatherford believed he knew the correct pace of change.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Weatherford to George J. Fisher, February 6, 1925, folder 3617, Weatherford Papers.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Weatherford's approach to ending segregation in many ways parallels the way private southern college presidents went about desegregating their institutions after World War II. They too felt they understood and knew how to go about resolving this issue. See Melissa Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

Nevertheless, despite Blue Ridge's seemingly moderate approach, the institution did begin whittling away at the racist structure of southern society. In 1924 Carver briefly integrated the center, sharing meals and sleeping at Craggy Cottage with the white Lynchburg delegation. In 1925 a young woman at Blue Ridge talked of the unthinkable, considering the possibility of blacks and whites intermarrying.²⁴⁴ This was a truly radical statement for the time, as interracial marriage was a felony in North Carolina and against the law in most other southern states. Weatherford spent a good deal of effort calming the potentially explosive consequences of that comment. Other events happened in ways that could not be controlled by the Blue Ridge leadership. Mordecai Johnson's 1926 visit illustrates this point. John Bergthold was able to bring Johnson into the main dining hall and have the university president served. Thus, this action showed the absurdity of the Jim Crow system. If Johnson was so light-skinned and could pass without notice, why did people so tenaciously cling to segregated customs? By the late 1930s blacks and whites were eating together at the center and occupying rooms in its main meeting hall.

Overall, the limitations of Blue Ridge are obvious and apparent. From 1912 to 1952, it was mainly an all-white conference center. In those years it did not openly dispute segregation, argue explicitly for social equality between blacks and whites, or condone interracial relationships/marriage. While black leaders and students faced less discrimination over time, Blue Ridge never became open to black guests who wanted to spend their vacations there like whites. Blacks could only come by invitation or as members of conference groups. In truth, the number of black leaders, speakers, and students who went to Blue Ridge in these years probably never exceeded more than a few

²⁴⁴ W. D. Weatherford to William Heyburne, September 4, 1925, folder 148, Weatherford Papers.

hundred. For the most part, these African Americans endured some form of segregated accommodations and dining.

Yet, it is also important to recognize what Blue Ridge accomplished. It did serve as a place where whites and blacks could meet and discuss racial problems. It was also a space where some blacks could come to speak and offer their views. Moreover, the conference center exposed whites—particularly young college men and women—to middle-class and professional African American educators and leaders. Blue Ridge also fostered an environment in which blacks were not thought to be innately inferior human beings. African Americans were capable of improvement, and Christians should treat them individually with value.

While perceptions cannot be quantified, it is clear that white students in particular were affected by what they saw, heard, and experienced at Blue Ridge. The relationships that some white youngsters developed with black speakers—like Carver—proved to be life changing. People like Kester went on to devote their lives to racial reconciliation and a radical understanding of the Christian faith. Of course Kester was atypical, and it would be unfair to attribute his efforts completely to his experiences at Blue Ridge. Nevertheless, it is clear that the conference center played a pivotal part in his life and that of many others. Don West, Frank Porter Graham, Martin England, and Francis Pickens Miller all recognized the influence Weatherford and Blue Ridge had had upon their lives. West and England had worked as Blue Ridge PWs in the summer of 1929.²⁴⁵ West—who became a radical on economics and race—later wrote Weatherford in 1958 noting,

²⁴⁵ See Donald L. West to W. D. Weatherford, October 27, 1958, folder 3825, Weatherford Papers; “Presidents of Student YMCA’s on Working Staff at Blue Ridge,” folder 3162, Weatherford Papers; J. Martin England to W. D. Weatherford, April 26, 1930, folder 1326, Weatherford Papers

“My early contact with your teachings did much to influence and direct my own life interests.”²⁴⁶ England, who also considered joining Weatherford’s YMCA Graduate School in Nashville, commented that Weatherford had helped him to “a new understanding of what the Kingdom of God really is.”²⁴⁷ England went on to aid in founding Koinonia with Clarence Jordan, and as the two made plans for establishing the community, they visited Weatherford in 1942.²⁴⁸ Miller—who became general secretary of the World Student Christian Fellowship and also challenged the conservative forces in Virginia politics in the late 1940s and early 1950s—credited Weatherford’s role in his development.²⁴⁹ At the time of Weatherford’s 91st birthday, Pickens wrote him, insisting “you were responsible for my beginning to think about our race problem and for starting me on the road to becoming a southern liberal.”²⁵⁰ Weatherford also had an impact on Frank Porter Graham in his early years as a student at the University of North Carolina and later, when Graham served as that school’s YMCA student secretary.²⁵¹ The two remained friends over the years as Graham rose to prominence, and Graham—in the wake of the 1954 *Brown* decision—credited him “with preparing the minds of Southern

²⁴⁶ West to Weatherford, October 27, 1958, folder 3825, Weatherford Papers. For more information on West’s life see James J. Lorence, *A Hard Journey: The Life of Don West* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

²⁴⁷ W. D. Weatherford to J. Martin England, August 29, 1929, folder 918, Weatherford Papers. For quote see Martin England to W. D. Weatherford, October 2, 1932, folder 1461, Weatherford Papers.

²⁴⁸ Martin England to W. D. Weatherford, October 13, 1942, folder 2871, Weatherford Papers. For information about England’s role in the creation of Koinonia see K’Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South*, 35–41.

²⁴⁹ Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877–1925)* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 192.

²⁵⁰ Francis Pickens Miller telegram to W. D. Weatherford, November 30, 1966, folder 3895, Weatherford Papers. See also Francis Pickens Miller, *Man from the Valley: Memoirs of a 20th-Century Virginian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 19.

²⁵¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 49 and 119.

youth of earlier decades for the historic Supreme Court segregation decision.”²⁵² Overall, what is most significant about Weatherford’s leadership of Blue Ridge is that he provided a space where race relations could be openly discussed. This had multiple and far-reaching consequences.

Between 1912 and 1952 Blue Ridge was a place where first steps could be taken to improve race relations between whites and blacks. This institution helped begin the process of changing individuals’ perceptions about race. Its program was slow and gradual. Even so, it represents what was considered possible in the South at this time if one wanted to address race relations but also desired for one’s institution to survive. How hard to push against the racial status quo in this period remained the major struggle for Blue Ridge. Yet, the efforts of this small YMCA conference center in the mountains of North Carolina helped initiate the change that would later move more rapidly.²⁵³

²⁵² Bill Lindau, “Graham Pays Tribute to Educator,” *Asheville Citizen*, June 25, 1956, newspaper clip, folder 3747, Weatherford Papers. For information on the friendship between Weatherford and Graham see also “Oral History Interview with Charles M. Jones,” November 8, 1976, Interview B-0041, Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

²⁵³ Blue Ridge continues to remain in existence. It is now officially known as YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly and is owned and operated by the YMCAs of the southern states.

Chapter 4—Professionalizing the Southern YMCA: The YMCA Graduate School, 1919–1936

In 1919 W. D. Weatherford received an offer to assume the presidency of Berea College in Kentucky.¹ It was a tempting proposition. Weatherford had been a member of Berea's Board of Trustees since 1915. The school's religious heritage and its combination of learning and labor matched his interests. However, Weatherford's commitment at this time lay with the southern YMCA, particularly the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training and a newly formed institution, Southern College of the Young Men's Christian Associations.

Southern College (renamed the YMCA Graduate School in 1927) was a unique institution with an ambitious vision.² Situated in Nashville, Tennessee, and in close proximity to Vanderbilt University, Scarritt College for Christian Workers, and George Peabody Teachers College, the school was created to provide professional training for YMCA workers.³ These "secretaries" filled positions as leaders of college YMCAs, worked in local city branches, and served at state, regional, and national administrative levels. This new institution was intended for white southern men and concentrated not only on training them to provide health and exercise programs, but also on giving them

¹ Shannon H. Wilson, *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 116.

² The name change took place in 1927 and reflected a desire to make the school a strictly graduate institution, offering only masters and doctorates. See "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of Southern College of Young Men's Christian Associations, Nashville, Tenn., May 21, 1927," p. 2, folder 418, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to John Adams, October 7, 1927, folder 372a, Weatherford Papers. The issue of the length of the school's name, as well as the existence of other "Southern Colleges" in the South also played a part in this decision. See "Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Board of Directors of Southern College, May 21, 1927," pp. 10–11, folder 418, Weatherford Papers. For simplicity, the school will be referred to as the YMCA Graduate School throughout the rest of the paper.

³ Willis D. Weatherford, "The Training Program of the Southern Y.M.C.A.'s," pp. 20–21, [1949], Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. See also Catalog and Announcements of the Southern College of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1922–1923, p. 3, folder 2, Weatherford Papers.

broad knowledge through a liberal arts education that would fit them to minister to the social and spiritual needs of the community.

When it was founded in 1919, the school became the only one of its kind in the South. Two other YMCA training centers already existed in the United States to prepare Association leadership, Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts, and George Williams College in Chicago.⁴ These institutions had been started in the late 1800s, and while they served students from all regions of the country, only a “small number” of southerners participated in their programs.⁵ According to Weatherford, there were three reasons why these two northern YMCA training schools were not attractive to future southern YMCA secretaries.⁶ First, he believed that their programs were more fitted for service in urban areas, and the South at this time was still largely rural. Second, these colleges were located a considerable distance outside the region, requiring significant travel and separation from home that discouraged many southerners. Finally, as graduates of these colleges began seeking work, northern Associations paid YMCA leaders higher salaries than their counterparts below the Mason-Dixon Line, thus making it unlikely that southerners trained in Springfield and Chicago would return to their native region for their careers. Weatherford could have also added another factor. These northern colleges did not address the issue of race relations between blacks and whites—a significant concern any southern YMCA leader would undoubtedly face.⁷ Training that

⁴ C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 175–177.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 612.

⁶ Weatherford, “Training Program,” 19. C. Howard Hopkins echoes this reasoning in his history of the North American YMCA, apparently pulling directly from Weatherford’s brief account of the training program of the southern YMCAs. See Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 612–613.

⁷ As late as 1935 Weatherford still insisted that these YMCA schools did not have “courses on Race Problems.” W. D. Weatherford to Carl M. White, December 11, 1935, folder 2059b, Weatherford Papers.

included concentration on this subject was vitally needed to prepare Association secretaries for the South. Serving as the institution's only president from 1919 to 1936, Weatherford faced this issue, advocating a largely gradualist position that emphasized knowledge of and provided opportunities for interaction with African Americans. Overall, through the YMCA Graduate School Weatherford sought to raise the standards and mission of the southern YMCA. In these same years he remained active in the running of Blue Ridge; yet, in this period the true focus and passion of his life was the YMCA Graduate School. Due to a number of reasons—principally the economic conditions of the Great Depression as well as the declining influence of the collegiate YMCAs across the nation—the school eventually closed, losing its educational facility in Nashville when it could not pay its \$155,000 loan to Vanderbilt University. Weatherford never completely reconciled to this project's failure, remaining bitter about it in future years.

Three writers have explored the importance of the YMCA Graduate School. Wilma Dykeman examines this institution as part of her popular biography of Weatherford, but she fails to treat it in a critical way.⁸ Based largely on interviews with and the personal writings of Weatherford, her book generally accepts his recollections and memories of how the school was operated. From this source material she argues that it was a high-quality institution. Moreover, she agrees with Weatherford that Vanderbilt and Chancellor James H. Kirkland had essentially mistreated the YMCA Graduate School by foreclosing on the institution's property.⁹ J. Edmund Welch, a professor of

⁸ See Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), for examples see 131–160, and 175–178.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 177–178.

physical education, also has studied this school but his work narrowly focuses on the history of the Doctor of Physical Education degree program there.¹⁰ Historian George Peter Antone provides the broadest and most scholarly appraisal of the subject in his dissertation on Weatherford's race relations career as well as in an article exclusively on the Graduate School's history published in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*.¹¹ In the latter, Antone provides a basic outline of the institution's history and educational program with the real heart of his work examining the fiscal decline and fall of the school. In particular, he disputes Dykeman's interpretation that Kirkland had unfairly treated Weatherford and the Graduate School and had hastily moved to foreclose on the property. He also questions Dykeman's assumption about the institution's quality. In essence I agree with Antone's argument regarding the relationship between Vanderbilt and the YMCA Graduate School, his interpretation of the economic collapse of the institution, and his criticism of Weatherford in this process. However, the YMCA Graduate School's academic program was stronger than Antone insisted. Indeed, a detailed picture of this institution reveals much about Weatherford's ideas on religion, race, and education in the years between 1919 and 1936.

The ambitious vision of the school—particularly its attention to race relations and interaction with African American institutions of higher education—deserves more attention. Through a close examination of the YMCA Graduate School's records as well as other documents unavailable to these earlier writers, this chapter will expand upon

¹⁰ J. Edmund Welch, "The Y.M.C.A. Graduate School of Nashville," *Forum* (March 1969): 13–16. For a rough draft of this article see J. Edmund Welch, "The Y.M.C.A. Graduate School of Nashville: An Untold Story of One Early Doctoral Program in Physical Education," folder 3776b, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹ George Peter Antone Jr., "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906–1946" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969); and George P. Antone, "The Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Nashville, 1919–1936," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32 (Spring-Winter 1973): 67–82.

previous scholarship exploring the quality and substance of the school's educational program and its contribution to the South and the YMCA at this time. Like Weatherford's administration of Blue Ridge, an analysis of his tenure at the YMCA Graduate School reveals the limits to his liberalism. In the end, while he sought to create a top-notch institution for preparing white southern YMCA secretaries, this vision was never truly realized.

Prior to the organization of this new school, Weatherford had been making his home in Nashville, Tennessee, working as the YMCA International Secretary for the South and Southwest and spending his summers at Blue Ridge.¹² At the time of the founding of the YMCA Graduate School, Weatherford was arguably the most important figure in the collegiate southern Y. Particularly his travel throughout the region and his running of Blue Ridge had made him well known. Moreover, he had been the author of several race relations and religious texts used by YMCA study groups.¹³ He was also now in his mid-forties, had been covering this region for over fifteen years, and had a wife and young son to care for. The opportunity to be more settled in Nashville with his family, and the chance to invest himself into the building of a school devoted to the professionalization of the YMCA secretariat, was very appealing.

Nevertheless, Weatherford was hesitant at first to take the presidency of the nascent institution. Indeed, he initially refused the call, not accepting it until after

¹² See YMCA Graduate School staff, 1930, folder 1048, Weatherford Papers.

¹³ See all of the following texts by W. D. Weatherford: *College Problems*, Vols. 1–3, (Nashville: Publishing House of M. E. Church, South, 1907, 1908, 1909); *Negro Life in the South* (New York: Association Press, 1910); *Introducing Men to Christ* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1911); *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (New York: Association Press, 1912); *Personal Elements in Religious Life* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916); and *Christian Life a Normal Experience* (New York: Association Press, 1916).

considering it for six months.¹⁴ According to Dykeman, Weatherford's reservations were due partly to his feelings that a divide existed between his liberal perspective and those of more conservative southern state YMCA secretaries. These persons in particular may well have found his progressive views on race and peace unsettling.¹⁵ Weatherford wanted their clear support before stepping into the role as leader of this new school.

Administrative changes taking place in his work as the International Student Secretary for the South also contributed to his making this career shift. Specifically, a recent restructuring of his department had essentially taken away his staff, ultimately leaving him "alone" in doing his duties.¹⁶ As Weatherford later explained his decision to lead this new school, he noted this issue and commented: "I was willing to withdraw to enter the College at the close of the War because I saw so very little hope ahead for doing a real piece of work in the South with only one man in the field."¹⁷ Thus, a number of elements—both professional and personal—combined at this time to attract Weatherford to this new post. And once he made this shift, his commitment lay with making this school successful. With characteristic enthusiasm and drive, Weatherford threw himself into the role of building the college. Indeed, Weatherford would turn down another promising job in 1924—that of a full professorship at Yale University—to maintain his attention to this institution and his concern for his native region.¹⁸

¹⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Cecil Gamble, January 18, 1933, folder 3224, Weatherford Papers; and Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 147–148.

¹⁵ For examples of Weatherford's pacifism see W. D. Weatherford to Herbert Hoover, December 3, 1931, folder 1257, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford, "Friends of the Radio Audience," March 1936, p. 8, folder 2140, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶ W. D. Weatherford to W. H. Morgan, March 6, 1930, folder 1084, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Newspaper clip, "'Y' College Head Declines Yale Call: Dr. W. D. Weatherford Prefers to Serve Southern Institution Here," June 8, 1924, RG 935, Alumni Relations, box 2687, folder 100, Vanderbilt University-Special Collections & University Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Weatherford was offered the

The origin of the YMCA Graduate School had both immediate and long-term causes. The precise timing resulted from the perceived success of training programs the southern YMCAs had operated during and immediately following World War I, the latter of which had helped inspire the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. According to Weatherford, it was at this time, during these post-war sessions, that several International YMCA secretaries came to him wanting to “establish a School for the training of our regular workers.”¹⁹ Blue Ridge was considered as a site but Weatherford concluded its “educational facilities were not adequate.”²⁰ A committee, with Weatherford as a member, was organized to study the possibility of a school and a suitable location.²¹ Eventually it was determined that Nashville, with its established higher educational structure, would prove fitting for the location of a YMCA training college, and on May 2, 1919, the school was organized.

The longer term reasoning behind the YMCA Graduate School’s existence grows out of Weatherford’s own experience as the International YMCA Secretary for the South and Southwest. For over fifteen years Weatherford moved throughout this region visiting private and state institutions, speaking and working with college YMCA chapters and student bodies, encouraging them in Christian living and an awareness of social concerns. Weatherford believed his work had been successful because he was able to make an intelligent argument for Christianity and the relevance of the YMCA that appealed to students in this skeptical era. Yet Weatherford did not achieve this perceived success

chair of Christian methods and would have been responsible for Yale’s program of training YMCA leaders. The former holder of this position, Henry B. Wright, had recently died.

¹⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Judson G. Rosebush, December 31, 1932, folder 1531, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ According to Weatherford the most “influential persons in the organization of the College were C. K. Ober, P. C. Dix, B. G. Alexander, R. H. King, and W. W. Alexander.” Weatherford to Rosebush, December 31, 1932, folder 1531, Weatherford Papers

because he had attended the YMCA schools in Chicago or Springfield. Rather, he came to feel his broad educational background at Vanderbilt and his continued study since graduation had been key. After specializing in English literature for his graduate work and finishing his Ph.D. in that field, he continued to read widely.²² Over time, Weatherford came to believe a rigorous liberal arts education with attention to sociology, history, religion, and theology—as well as specialized YMCA training in athletic leadership and Association history and methods—were all vital for a YMCA secretary to be effective in the college setting.²³ Moreover he believed this type of expansive training was also critical for preparing YMCA secretaries to be sound leaders of local Y organizations.

Essentially, Weatherford came to see the position of YMCA secretary as a profession that took real preparation, rather than a transient position that people could enter without any background save athletic experience. As Antone noted, Weatherford's dream was not the reality at the time since "Most salaried 'Y' workers during this period were untrained and they generally approached their work on a temporary basis."²⁴ Weatherford's vision for the newly formed school would be to prepare leaders to be equipped to meet the spiritual as well as the physical needs of people. As he would later argue in one of his commencement addresses to the school's graduates, he strongly believed they needed to be "thinkers first and doers second."²⁵ Specifically, here he was

²² See "Notes by WD Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

²³ Indeed Weatherford believed such broad training was essential for all "social and religious worker[s]" and they should specifically complete "advanced studies in Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Religious Education and kindred subjects." See W. D. Weatherford, "Training of Social and Religious Workers," *Journal of Social Forces* 2 (January 1924), 211.

²⁴ Antone, "YMCA Graduate School," 68.

²⁵ W. D. Weatherford, "What Kind of Workers Do Our Communities Need?" August 1934, folder 1851b, Weatherford Papers.

asserting that being a YMCA secretary was not just about setting up athletic activities and other programs for people. This job required more depth and insight for these leaders to be effective at meeting all levels of people's needs. To sum up, the YMCA Graduate School merged Weatherford's two abiding passions, religion and education. Broad liberal arts training combined with practical skills would prepare YMCA secretaries to be valuable leaders in the South, increasing the effectiveness of that organization and helping to transform the region and country. The YMCA Graduate School would reflect Weatherford's philosophy and vision.

Despite such grandiose intentions, the school began rather inauspiciously. At the institution's tenth anniversary in 1929, Weatherford recalled those early days, noting "we opened our school in rooms rented from the Vanderbilt School of Religion. We had a staff of five workers, two of whom were on half time, we had fifteen students, we had not a dollar in endowment or equipment."²⁶ The school not only began with this close connection to Vanderbilt but also remained intimately related to the university throughout its existence, and particularly with the School of Religion.²⁷ Indeed, until 1927, the YMCA school used Vanderbilt's divinity school for its offices, classrooms, and also boarding space for its students.²⁸ Also throughout this period, a reciprocal credit system existed between the YMCA Graduate School and Vanderbilt. Students at the Y school

²⁶ "Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Board of Directors of Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Nashville, April 19, 1929," p. 1, folder 857, Weatherford Papers.

²⁷ See Antone, "YMCA Graduate School," 70; Paul K. Conkin, *Gone With the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 264; and "Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Board of Directors of Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Nashville, April 19, 1929," p. 1, folder 857, Weatherford Papers.

²⁸ Southern College 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 17, folder 2, Weatherford Papers.

could take up to half of their work at this other institution, allowing for diversity of course offerings and flexibility.²⁹

The Graduate School operated on the quarter system. Three terms (fall, winter, and spring) took place in Nashville with the fourth quarter held at the Blue Ridge Association in Black Mountain, North Carolina.³⁰ In this summer program, the Graduate School's professors and students moved to Blue Ridge. Students usually served on the center's working staff, providing them a way to earn their living and educational costs. There were also undergraduate students on the staff, and they were required to take at least one of the courses offered by the Graduate School in combination with their work activities. Employed YMCA secretaries also had the opportunity to take course work in these months. While they could not graduate without spending time in Nashville, this work was intended to make them more effective leaders and give them credit if they later choose to matriculate at the YMCA Graduate School.³¹

This combination of having undergraduate, graduate, and employed secretaries all as students in the same classes had some drawbacks. Weatherford's vision for Blue Ridge was that it would be a place of work and scholarship. Since both undergraduates and graduate students on the working staff had to fulfill their labor duties as well as their course work, these responsibilities put added demands on students' study and class time, particularly at busy points such as when conferences checked in or out. This pressure almost certainly strained the academic program's intensity. Some of the undergraduates

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16. This arrangement also existed with Peabody.

³⁰ Southern College 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 4, folder 2, Weatherford Papers.

³¹ The 1922–1923 school catalog notes that three hours of project work, along with a seminar, in the city of Nashville was required of each student. See Southern College, 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 18, folder 2, Weatherford Papers. Antone also notes that “Students were encouraged to be in residence throughout the year, that is three quarters in Nashville and the summer quarter at Blue Ridge. The requirements made this virtually mandatory.” Antone, “YMCA Graduate School,” 71.

may also have not been as interested in their studies as they were in having the experience of being around other young people and spending a summer in the cooler mountain climate. According to a critical survey of Blue Ridge by the National Council of the YMCA in 1925, “classes were diluted by this unwilling or disinterested group and also by some that were not equally well prepared.”³² Overall, the academic rigor of the YMCA Graduate School’s summer term had some limitations.

When Southern College of the YMCAs opened in September 1919, it initially offered courses for white male undergraduate and graduate students. Three degrees, a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and Doctorate in Physical Education (D.P.E.) were obtainable.³³ Nevertheless, Weatherford believed the professionalization of the YMCA secretary truly required graduate work. From the early years at the school he intended it to be a “professional school of graduate grade,” essentially only taking students who had completed four year colleges.³⁴ However, this setup did not prove possible because many of the students he was able to recruit were not that well prepared. Indeed, two out of the school’s first five graduates received only their B.A.³⁵ In 1927 the school officially dropped the bachelor’s program and in theory only admitted college graduates, changing the institution’s name to the YMCA Graduate School to reflect this move.³⁶ Yet even though the undergraduate program was dissolved, students continued to receive the B.A.

³² J. W. McCandless, “A Survey of the Operations of the Blue Ridge Association and Accompanying Recommendations,” 1925, folder 768, p. 2, Weatherford Papers.

³³ Southern College, 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 14, folder 2, Weatherford Papers.

³⁴ Southern College, 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 13, folder 2, Weatherford Papers.

³⁵ See “Graduates,” folder 465, Weatherford Papers; and “List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates, August 1935,” folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

³⁶ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of Southern College of Young Men’s Christian Associations, Nashville, Tenn., May 21, 1927,” p. 2, folder 418, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to John Adams, October 7, 1927, folder 372a, Weatherford Papers.

until 1933.³⁷ As Antone has noted, the real heart of the school's program was the M.A., with roughly two thirds of the school's graduates receiving this degree.³⁸ While a doctorate was available, few of these were ever conferred. Yet, the institution was innovative in its offering, being only one of three institutions in the United States (the others being Columbia University and New York University) to first provide this program.³⁹ The D.P.E. was eventually superseded by a Ph.D. in that field, and a combined total of five men achieved this terminal degree in these years.⁴⁰ Over the course of the institution's seventeen-year history there were approximately one hundred graduates from the school, with about a third of them receiving a B.A.⁴¹

Throughout the school's existence a limited number of white women also attended. Most of them would have been Blue Ridge summer staff workers, but a small portion also matriculated in Nashville.⁴² In the early years most of the women students at the school were spouses of the male students, but no women graduated in the period. However in 1927 a woman, "Mrs. Henry Hart," petitioned to be able to receive a degree if she finished her coursework.⁴³ Taking this request to the Graduate School's Board of Directors, Weatherford recommended "the faculty be given the privilege of offering

³⁷ "List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates, August 1935," folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

³⁸ Antone, "YMCA Graduate School," 71; and "List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates, August 1935," folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

³⁹ Welch, "YMCA Graduate School," 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15. From 1919 to 1931 to D.P.E. was the doctorate offered. However, in 1932 the school began offering only the Ph.D. in physical education. See also "List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates, August 1935," folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

⁴¹ In the August records of 1935, an additional ten students seem to have been close to finishing, either lacking their thesis or "some little of academic work to be completed." See "List of YMCA Graduate School Graduate, August 1935," folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

⁴² See "Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Board of Directors of Southern College, May 21, 1927," p. 8, folder 418, Weatherford Papers.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

degrees in such cases to women.”⁴⁴ The board accepted, and in 1929 two women—Luan Traudt Carroll and Lucy Gillean—received their master’s degrees.⁴⁵ Over the course of the Graduate School’s life, six women earned degrees, all the M.A.

The opportunities white women received for education at the school were not extended to African Americans of either sex. However, in 1927 a committee was appointed “to consider the possibility of working out training for Negro secretaries.”⁴⁶ Writing to John H. McGrew, a secretary in the YMCA’s Colored Work department, Weatherford invited him to join this group, which included Will Alexander, R. H. King, and Weatherford, to study the idea.⁴⁷ Plans were made to meet that summer at Blue Ridge. While the discussion of this issue at that gathering or in subsequent talks is not recorded, African Americans were never officially accepted as students at the YMCA Graduate School. As a result, the black Associations were not willing to financially support the school and chose instead to send their money to the Chesapeake Summer School, a training center for African American secretaries run at the time in Bordentown, New Jersey.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, it appears several black students did take courses unofficially at the YMCA Graduate School in the 1930s. Writing to Clarence Shedd, a Yale Divinity School professor, who later inquired about this arrangement, Weatherford noted it occurred for three consecutive years but went on to say “They were not matriculated and

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ See “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors Held at the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Nashville, Tennessee, April 19, 1929,” p. 3, folder 618, Weatherford Papers; and “List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates, August 1935,” folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁶ W. D. Weatherford to J. H. McGrew, July 1, 1927, folder 475, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; and Nina Mjagkij, *Light in Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852–1946* (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 39.

⁴⁸ W. B. Mitchell, Jr. to C. C. Shedd, September 26, 1930, folder 1239a, Weatherford Papers.

they did not pay fees for that was not possible without violation of the law, but we could do as we did in Nashville quietly because of the fact that there was nobody to raise an issue about it and the students simply came in and set [sic] in on the classes.”⁴⁹ As at Blue Ridge, Weatherford was facing segregation laws that made it illegal to educate white and black students together. And just as he handled it cautiously in North Carolina, he did so in Tennessee.

Very little is known of the African American students who came to the YMCA Graduate School. Yet, documents show that one of these was a graduate of Nashville’s state black university—Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School (A and I).⁵⁰ In the spring of 1934 this man attended Weatherford’s Applied Anthropology course, a race relations seminar that likely was the class that attracted other black students to the school. Weatherford spoke positively of this man, noting that he was “a very choice chap” who was “working with a group of colored boys here in the community.”⁵¹ The A and I graduate was serving at Bethlehem Center in the city. Run by the Methodist Church, this was one of Nashville’s settlement homes that offered social outreach, including housekeeping skills, education, and recreation opportunities, to the city’s poor, particularly African American youth.⁵² According to Don Doyle’s history of Nashville since the 1920s, this institution brought together social work students from

⁴⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Clarence P. Shedd, May 17, 1937, folder 2365, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁰ See W. D. Weatherford to G. Lake Imes, April 16, 1934, folder 1912, Weatherford Papers.

⁵¹ W. D. Weatherford to C. D. Barr, May 8, 1934, folder 1967, Weatherford Papers.

⁵² See Don H. Doyle, *Nashville Since the 1920s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 52–53 and W. D. Weatherford, ed., *A Survey of the Negro Boy in Nashville, Tennessee* (New York: Association Press, 1932), 103. It also served as a meeting place for conferences. A “Conference for Colored Women” met there September 17–24, 1927 and Weatherford was on the program as presenting a session on interracial work. See “Conference for Colored Women” program, folder 486, Weatherford Papers.

Fisk, Scarritt, and “other colleges.”⁵³ The YMCA Graduate School would likely have contributed such workers, and it is probably through this association that this African American man took the initiative to go to Weatherford’s class. While Weatherford’s attitudes were no doubt seen as somewhat paternalistic, his sympathy and concern for African Americans, the issue of race relations, and his published work on the subject, all would have made it appealing to study with him.

Another possibility explaining this black man’s interest and that of the other “unofficial” African American students at the YMCA Graduate School is the connection between Weatherford and the eminent Fisk sociology professor at the time, Charles Spurgeon Johnson. In 1934 the two co-authored a book, *Race Relations: Adjustment of Whites and Negroes in the United States*.⁵⁴ Intended as a college textbook on the subject, it had nearly 600 pages covering a broad range of topics from the origins of race to present issues in the relationships between blacks and whites in the United States. The book also had the curious feature of having each chapter on the table of contents page initialed by the corresponding author so that who had written what would be clearly known. At this time such a co-authored book on this subject was unusual, and according to its introduction, “no textbook in sociology ha[d] heretofore been undertaken by a white man and a Negro as joint authors.”⁵⁵ In a chapter below, discussing Weatherford’s later work at Fisk, a more thorough analysis of this book will be undertaken, but the important thing to remember at this point is that Weatherford’s willingness to work with Johnson on

⁵³ Doyle, *Nashville Since the 1920s*, 53.

⁵⁴ See Willis D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson, *Race Relations: Adjustment of Whites and Negroes in the United States* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1934).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, viii.

such a project was atypical and, furthermore, signaled his concern over current racial conditions.

Since the school's inception in 1919 Weatherford had been teaching race relations courses. Indeed, Weatherford offered a total of four under the course listing "Applied Anthropology."⁵⁶ Describing these classes in 1935 to Fisk University librarian Carl White, Weatherford noted: "The first course is a general outline for physical anthropology meant to orient the student to the idea that it does take a long time to develop or change a race. The second is a study of race development. The third is a course in the creative expression of the American Negro. The fourth course is a course in problems of bi-racial civilization."⁵⁷ Weatherford taught these "anthropology" classes in Nashville—where the African Americans students had sat in—as well as at Blue Ridge where white men and women college students had access.

In 1927, after Blue Ridge students had completed one of these anthropology courses, Weatherford required them to reflect on its impact.⁵⁸ According to one student, Mary Heath, this particular class had covered a wide range of topics including "lynching, Negro newspapers, the legal status of the Negro, economic conditions, labor unions, migration movements, Negro crime, poetry, novels, and certain proposed solutions."⁵⁹ Overall, the students' reactions showed the course had a profound effect upon how they

⁵⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Carl M. White, December 11, 1935, folder 2059b, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See "YMCA Graduate School (1927): Anthropology [Course evaluations]," folder 373, Weatherford Papers. Based on the content of these reactions, this course may have been an accelerated form of Weatherford's race relations classes, encompassing aspects of all four courses into one. This probably would have been the case because the Blue Ridge summer working staff might only have one opportunity to study race relations whereas students matriculated in Nashville could take all four courses during their years of study.

⁵⁹ "Reactions to the Term's Work. Mary Heath." folder 373, Weatherford Papers.

viewed these issues.⁶⁰ One pupil, Rachel Phillips, commented that she had developed “a deep appreciation for [African American] literature and especially his poetry” and also felt “ready and willing to work with the Negroes, that is in some social service work, a thing which I did not believe I would ever be able to do.”⁶¹ Another participant in the class, Jerome A. Conner, wrote very candidly about what this experience had meant to him, noting

Upon entering this class, I was of the opinion that the negro was a “nigger,” worthy of little consideration and practically no effort on the part of the white man. . . . However I have come to recognize that the negro is a human being and a soul covered by God with the black skin that caused me so readily to dislike him. I know that his present-day reactions are largely determined by his inheritance, his social environment and his physical environment of centuries past. His faults are logical and his short-comings are not due to his own efforts, or lack of effort, altogether.⁶²

Weatherford’s course emphasized the environmental factors that accounted for the status of African Americans at this time. The circumstances of slavery and discrimination since Emancipation, as well as their African past—which Weatherford tended to overdo—explained the perceived cultural inferiority of black Americans. Weatherford’s argument was that this status was not fixed but changeable. As these course reflections reveal, such a view was not so apparent to even white southerners attending college in the 1920s. Educating this group about African American history and culture was an important way for them to move beyond the negative stereotypes of blacks that they had previously been taught.

⁶⁰ One disclaimer is necessary before further analyzing these students’ comments. All of the students wrote their remarks and attached their name to the statements. Thus, these students may have felt pressured to impress Weatherford with their “enlightenment” on the subject, and there possibly may have been fear that their statements might affect their grade.

⁶¹ “Reaction to the Term’s Course. Rachel Phillips.” folder 373, Weatherford Papers.

⁶² “Reactions to the Term’s Work. Jerome A. Connor.” folder 373, Weatherford Papers.

Despite Weatherford's attempt to offer a progressive message in this course, the class would only go so far, particularly in what programs it advocated for changing the inequality that existed between blacks and whites. While Weatherford insisted his school's "function" was not "to teach men what to think but to teach them how to think," based on the responses from these students and his course assignments, Weatherford was essentially advocating a gradualist position.⁶³ Since Weatherford held this view himself, his instruction was slanted to encourage his students to also accept it. His class emphasized knowledge and appreciation for African American achievements—particularly in literature, poetry, and music—believing that as students became aware of these facts, their views on blacks would change. As perspectives broadened, these future leaders would work toward providing better education and opportunities for African Americans and slowly over time—this might take generations—blacks would receive political and social equality. One student's evaluation of the course helps to illustrate Weatherford's perspective. Lucile Watkins wrote

After six weeks of Anthropology, I see more clearly than ever my part in racial adjustment doesn't consist in having heated arguments with this teacher or that girl – at least until I've acquired more facts that I've been able to get in these six weeks. The biggest thing I've gotten out of this course is a knowledge of the place I can get facts I want – books on the Negro, books of the Negro – and a growing idea that doing the "next steps" accomplished more than the antagonism that results from too much radicalism.⁶⁴

Another student noted his belief in slow, but steady, progress. E. F. Martin commented that African Americans should not be held down by "hindering" their education and kept in servile roles but a better method would be to "gradually give the Negro a better educational system, and as he develops give him a voice in government and also to give

⁶³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 150.

⁶⁴ "Reaction to this Term's Work. Lucile Watkins." folder 373, Weatherford Papers.

him a better chance in the economic life of the country.”⁶⁵ Efforts to end Jim Crow segregation were not advised, and few students seemed to have departed “Applied Anthropology” viewing structural change as the best means to correct racial problems. Indeed, only one of the twenty-three students responded that there was a need to use political measures to change the status quo. Rachel Phillips noted that she “wished to see something done immediately about the injustice in courts and in politics” and that she was “highly [sic] enraged about lynching and mobs.”⁶⁶ Weatherford’s gradualist approach had the value of pointing these white college students in the right direction, yet his failure to address structural concerns kept change from moving as quickly as it might have.

Weatherford’s assignments for this course also reveal a mixture of progressive views and cautious moderation. The reading list for the 1934 class includes W. E. B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, poetry by Paul Laurence Dunbar and Claude McKay, plays by Alain Locke, Booker T. Washington’s autobiography *Up from Slavery*, and Robert R. Moton’s *What the Negro Thinks*.⁶⁷ Having to read Du Bois at a white southern institution at this time would not have been as palatable for students as those works by more conservative figures like Washington and Moton. Weatherford’s inclusion of Du Bois’s work as well as those from Harlem Renaissance writers represents a forward step for this period. In his 1932 course, Weatherford also had his students read Du Bois’s *Dark Princess* (1928), a novel examining race and radical politics as well as Charles

⁶⁵ “Reaction to the Term’s Work. E. F. Martin.” Folder 373, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁶ “Reaction to the Term’s Course. Rachel Phillips.” Folder 373, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁷ “Anthropology Required Readings,” 1934, folder 1873, Weatherford Papers. The 1933 anthropology class also read *The Souls of Black Folk*. See “Class in Anthropology,” 1933, folder 1695, Weatherford Papers.

Waddell Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), which explored the complexity of race in the South for light-skinned blacks and the phenomenon of "passing."⁶⁸ Despite exposing his students to African American radical and conservative views on race, Weatherford's course was pushing them toward an acceptance of the latter approach. For example, in the Anthropology exam of 1932, Weatherford required his students to "Criticize Dubois 'Dark Princess.'"⁶⁹ Out of the eleven questions on this test, most asked to describe or compare various black writers and artists, yet this was the only question that explicitly asked students to "criticize." *Dark Princess* (1928) was a radical book for its time, and it seems clear Weatherford wanted his students to be wary of such ideas, focusing in on the problems of such an approach rather than the positives. He wanted what he termed a "sane" and "constructive" approach, clearly not what he considered Du Bois's style to be.⁷⁰ In another series of questions for his 1934 course, Weatherford asked his students' to describe Du Bois, Washington, and Moton's "philosophy of progress."⁷¹ He obviously wanted them to know the different perspectives of each, but it seems overall that his students would have known to which he subscribed. Indeed, evaluations of Weatherford's teaching style revealed that his students found him to be less than completely open-minded, having a tendency to show some degree of "dogmatic attitudes."⁷²

⁶⁸ "To Class in Anthropology," 1932, folder 1439, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁹ "Anthropology Examination, Spring Quarter 1932," folder 1439, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁰ These two words were continually used by Weatherford in this period, showing his moderate approach to race relations. For example when Moton was appointed to fill Washington's place at Tuskegee, Weatherford praised the former as "one of the sanest and strongest representatives of the negro race." See "Moton Appointed to Head Tuskegee," *New York Times*, December 21, 1915, p. 4.

⁷¹ "Anthropology," 1934, p. 3, folder 1873, Weatherford Papers.

⁷² See "Senior Student's Opinions Records for Faculty Members," 1932, folder 1470a, Weatherford Papers. This file includes six evaluations, and all but one of them indicates some level of rigidity on Weatherford's part.

One other exam question provides evidence of Weatherford's bias. For the 1933 anthropology test Weatherford laid out a scenario strikingly similar to an actual issue he encountered several years earlier at Blue Ridge. In 1926 the YWCA secretary for Florida State College for Women had wanted to bring a few black women to speak for a conference at the YMCA center, but only under the circumstances of no discrimination. Weatherford sanctioned these women's visit yet would not grant them the right to sit in the main dining hall with the white guests and students. The YWCA did not accept Weatherford's ruling and did not invite African American women for that conference. Weatherford's 1933 exam hypothesized a very similar situation, changing the issue from having black women leaders come and eat in the main dining hall, to that of having African American female fraternal delegates attend and dine there.⁷³ After setting up these circumstances, Weatherford's assignment to these students was "Write my answer to her" followed by a question asking them to state "Your workable program."⁷⁴ It seems obvious from how this question was written that his class had discussed this particular issue and that Weatherford had defended how he had handled this situation. And at first glance he appears to be asking neither a biased nor leading question since he was encouraging his students to see his position and then recommend their own, essentially allowing them to think for themselves. However, the key word to focus on is "workable." Students could not propose a truly radical position because he would have argued it was not feasible in the context. For example, if they had answered by arguing that these black students must be admitted to the dining room on equal terms with whites, Weatherford would have countered this was not a practical plan because of the problems

⁷³ "Anthropology Exam, 1933," folder 1695, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

that would have arisen. In short, by requiring these students to outline a “workable program,” Weatherford was pushing these students to accept his moderate approach on race.

The issue of African Americans dining was not merely an academic one for the YMCA Graduate School. It too faced this concern when having black guests at its facility. In 1928, after a meeting of black and white YMCA leaders at the school, the Southern Regional Association of Boys’ Work Secretaries registered “a protest against the discrimination against negroes as have been in evidence by the necessity of having a private luncheon because the colored men in our group could not go thru the dining room.”⁷⁵ Just as Weatherford had rationalized this eating policy at Blue Ridge, he wrote back to the protester emphasizing the practical issues at stake. Weatherford noted:

let me say that we still live in the world and not in Heaven, and as one responsible for a big institution, it is perfectly impossible for me to live faster than I can lead the community in which I live. Of course you know as well as I do, that if we took Negroes into our cafeteria, we would have an empty room from then on, and it is useless for any group to register a protest unless they have the cash to put up the deficit. It is a plain matter of business which we simply cannot overlook.⁷⁶

Thus “business” trumped fair treatment on this occasion. However, even though this complaint was leveled, another black observer from this same event had also written Weatherford praising “The uniform courtesy and thoughtfulness on the part of the office staff.”⁷⁷ This man, Channing Tobias, was the senior secretary of the YMCA’s Colored Work Department at this time.⁷⁸ Tobias went on to congratulate Weatherford on his

⁷⁵ L. T. Knotter to W. D. Weatherford, February 10, 1928, folder 652, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁶ W. D. Weatherford to L. T. Knotter, February 14, 1928, folder 652, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁷ Channing H. Tobias to W. D. Weatherford, February 6, 1928, folder 3627, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁸ See Tobias biography on finding aid of Channing Tobias Papers, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. For more information about Tobias see John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 125, 239, 287, and 414.

work at the school and his impact on students' racial attitudes. He concluded his letter stating, "My visit to your institution has made of me an enthusiastic rooter for it."⁷⁹

These African Americans' complaints and praises directed at the YMCA Graduate School show the complexity of the times, and suggest Weatherford's rationale for the moderate course in which he directed the institution.

Despite the limits to Weatherford's academic classes, he did allow the perspectives of others to be aired in his classroom. In 1930 he began inviting black professors from Fisk University to deliver lectures on their specialized fields, such as African American folklore, music, literature, drama, and art.⁸⁰ The reception of these invited professors to his "experiment" was enthusiastic, with John M. Work, Lorenzo Turner, E. Franklin Frazier, and Lillian E. Cashin accepting.⁸¹ Cashin made plans to give a lecture on "Negro Drama" and Frazier on the "Negro family," while Turner would offer three lectures on "Negro literature" and Work—who directed the Fisk Jubilee Singers—would deliver one on "Negro music."⁸² This arrangement continued in future years, with James Weldon Johnson coming to lecture in 1932 on poetry, Millard Burwell on African

⁷⁹ Tobias to Weatherford, February 6, 1928, folder 3627, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁰ W. D. Weatherford to A. P. Watson and E. Franklin Frazier, February 13, 1930, folder 1047, Weatherford Papers.

⁸¹ See John M. Work to W. D. Weatherford, February 24, 1930, folder 1047b, Weatherford Papers; Lorenzo D. Turner to W. D. Weatherford, February 17, 1930, folder 1047b, Weatherford Papers; E. Franklin Frazier to W. D. Weatherford, February 27, 1930, folder 1047b, Weatherford Papers; and L. E. Cashin to W. D. Weatherford, February 17, 1930, folder 1047b, Weatherford Papers. Cashin's letter refers to Weatherford's idea as an "experiment," indicating this probably was the first time that this arrangement had occurred between the schools. For a listing of these Fisk professors and other faculty at the time see the school yearbook, *The Lighthouse*, 1930, Volume 1 (Nashville: Fisk University), 19–23, Fisk University Franklin Library, Special Collections.

⁸² See Cashin to Weatherford, February 17, 1930; Frazier to Weatherford, February 27, 1930; Turner to Weatherford, February 17, 1930; and Work to Weatherford February 24, 1930 all in folder 1047b, Weatherford Papers.

American folk-music, and Turner on his earlier topic.⁸³ In 1934 Johnson returned to give four lectures, with two other Fisk professors also providing lessons.⁸⁴ It is not clear why Weatherford begin such a procedure at this time, though he noted in his initial letter in 1930 that “Sometime ago I talked with Dr. Thos. E. Jones [Fisk president] about getting cooperation” on this idea.⁸⁵ An optimistic view of Weatherford’s intentions would be that he had esteem and respect for black culture and wanted to expose his students to experts in these fields. Moreover, providing interaction for these future YMCA leaders with professional African Americans would have been something Weatherford recognized as beneficial.

The source material on this subject does not lend itself to doubt the genuineness of Weatherford’s motives, but another contributing factor probably played an important part in Weatherford’s decision to bring in these scholars. Throughout the Graduate School’s existence, finances remained an issue, with the school eventually collapsing because of them. Weatherford appealed to numerous northern philanthropic organizations to lend aid to the institution. Several of these, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund, all had provisions to provide aid for race-related work.⁸⁶ Weatherford received funding for his school because of this aspect of the curriculum. Thus having African American professors from Fisk University would have been a visible way to show how the YMCA Graduate School was cooperating with black colleges in the city. Weatherford was a

⁸³ W. D. Weatherford memorandum to “Students in Anthropology,” March 15, 1932, folder 1439, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁴ W. D. Weatherford memorandum “To All Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Students,” March 13, 1934, folder 1873, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁵ Weatherford to Watson, and Franklin, February 13, 1930, folder 1047b, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁶ Antone, “YMCA Graduate School,” 75.

shrewd politician when it came to gathering financial support for his institutions, and a relationship between Fisk and the Y school would have been an achievement worthy of note. Indeed it is clear that the YMCA Graduate School kept records of such accomplishments.⁸⁷ Yet at the same time, such efforts that appealed to northern givers probably did not sit well with many white southerners. Thus, Weatherford's labors were double-edged, most likely bringing larger donations from the North than the South, but perhaps at the expense of southern financial and non-monetary support.⁸⁸

The Graduate School received extensive financial backing from northern philanthropic foundations. Like other southern educational leaders of this period, Weatherford courted these givers in this period to help build his institution, and he was very successful in his endeavors. In 1924 Weatherford secured an annual gift of \$25,000 for five years from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund.⁸⁹ Later this agency granted the YMCA Graduate School an additional \$250,000, which Weatherford and the school's board appropriated toward constructing its own educational building in Nashville. John D. Rockefeller then provided an additional \$15,000 a year for five years, a bequest that ended in 1935.⁹⁰ In total, allowing for smaller grants for buying race

⁸⁷ See Tula B. Pellettieri to W. D. Weatherford, August 3, 1932, folder 1506, Weatherford Papers. For a listing of the uses of the YMCA Graduate School's special collection of race relations' materials, particularly by other higher education institutions' faculty—including Fisk and A and I Normal—tabulated for the Spelman Fund see W. D. Weatherford to Anna Blauvelt, August 5, 1932, folder 1536, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁸ Antone notes that Weatherford decision to “press the issue” of race relations probably resulted in “significant” loss of financial support for the institution. Antone, “YMCA Graduate School,” 72.

⁸⁹ W. D. Moore memorandum, March 7, 1935, folder 2049, Weatherford Papers.

⁹⁰ W. D. Weatherford to George O. Stoll, March 18, 1935, folder 2049, Weatherford Papers. It is unclear whether this gift came from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund. The Spelman Memorial Fund dissolved on January 3, 1929, and merged with the Rockefeller Foundation. See description of Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund on The Rockefeller Center Archive website: <http://www.rockarch.org/>. In describing this \$15,000 gift for five years, Weatherford only notes that Rockefeller's secretary, Arthur Packard, visited the college sometime in 1928. Yet the bequest was for 5

relations material for the school's library, the Rockefellers gave the YMCA Graduate School a total of \$465,000 by 1935.⁹¹ The school also received over \$18,000 in combined gifts from the Phelps-Stokes Fund and Julius Rosenwald Fund in 1929 for race relations work and library materials.⁹² The Rosenwald Fund went on to provide \$50,000 to the Graduate School over the period of 1931 to 1936 to aid in the "establishment of a race relations department."⁹³ Another gift of \$50,000 came from the heirs of the McCormick reaper fortune to help with setting up this post.⁹⁴ Thus, the promising nature of the school and its ambitious vision was reflected in the nearly \$600,000 in donations from northern groups.

Weatherford's friendly relationship with Fisk led to more interactions with that school in the 1930s. In 1933, while Charles Spurgeon Johnson and Weatherford were working together on their book, the former invited the latter to visit and speak on one of the following topics: "The Plantation, or the Old South or the Attitude of the Church toward slavery."⁹⁵ Weatherford's class also made visits to Fisk in these years.⁹⁶ In 1934,

years and ended in 1935. Thus, it may have been a gift from the Rockefeller Foundation since it began in 1930.

⁹¹ Moore memorandum, March 7, 1935, folder 2049, Weatherford Papers.

⁹² Antone, "YMCA Graduate School," 75.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Clyde Stillwell, October 27, 1928, folder 669, Weatherford Papers. This money actually came from Virginia McCormick, daughter of Cyrus McCormick. However, it appears this donation was arranged by Anita McCormick Blaine (Virginia's sister), who acted in Virginia's stead due to her mental health issues. For information on Blaine see Gilbert Harrison, *A Timeless Affair: The Life of Anita McCormick Blaine*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Weatherford courted Blaine for donations throughout the 1920s and 1930s. See "1925 YMCA Graduate School: Blaine, Mrs. Emmons," folder 64; "1926 YMCA Graduate School: Blaine, Mrs. Emmons (donor)," folder 198; "1927 YMCA Graduate School: Blaine, Mrs. Emmons (donor)," folder 379; "1929 YMCA Graduate School: Blaine, Mrs. Emmons (donor)," folder 836; and "1931 YMCA Graduate School: Blaine, Mrs. Emmons (donor)," folder 1326, all in Weatherford Papers.

⁹⁵ Charles S. Johnson to W. D. Weatherford, April 10, 1933, folder 3644b, Weatherford Papers.

⁹⁶ Pellettieri to Weatherford, August 3, 1932, folder 1506, Weatherford Papers. This document notes that "Each year classes from the Grad. School visit Tuskegee and Fisk University in order to better understand the educational problems and progress of the Negro."

part of Weatherford's Anthropology course's requirements was a trip to Fisk's spring festival.⁹⁷

An exchange relationship between the two school's libraries fostered further interaction. Since its early years, the YMCA Graduate School had been trying to develop in their library a special collection of documents related to African Americans, with particular attention to the Old South.⁹⁸ This concentration grew out of Weatherford's own interest in race relations as well as his published work in that field. His previous books, *Negro Life in the South* (1910), *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (1912), and *The Negro from Africa to America* (1924) had put Weatherford in touch with these sources, and it is likely he had already developed a personal collection of these materials. For his fledgling institution, he sought to build up a strong basis of these items, particularly since he taught classes in this area and also wanted graduate work—which would have required research in primary sources—at the school. Another reason behind the desire to put together strong holdings in this field was Weatherford's belief that this was a way to direct young white southerners' attention to the present plight of blacks. Writing to Fisk's president Thomas Jones in 1929, Weatherford outlined the following reasoning:

The most ready approach to the interest of the present white youth is through the history of the old South. Herein there is less of prejudice, and all antagonisms are sublimated by the glory and halo of a romantic past. White students will approach the study of the economic, religious, health and social conditions of the Negro in pre-civil war days without the least prejudice, and through such a study they easily pass over into a genuine interest in the present status of the Negro.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Weatherford memorandum "To All Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Students," March 13, 1934, folder 1873, Weatherford Papers.

⁹⁸ "Lend a Hand in Developing a Unique Library in the South," *Blue Ridge Voice*, January 1926, p. 14.

⁹⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, February 22, 1929, folder 887, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford makes the same argument in his article "Changing Attitudes of Southern Students," *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (April, 1933), 148–149.

Thus with this rationale in mind, the Graduate School began acquiring written documents of all types on this subject. Weatherford's efforts proved successful in securing this material with the library amassing 2,338 books, pamphlets, bound and unbound magazines, and newspapers on slavery in 1930, and more than 4,600 by 1932.¹⁰⁰ This special collection would prove to be one of the strongest elements of the institution, and when it closed in 1936 it was sold to Fisk University for \$20,000.¹⁰¹

During the Graduate School's tenure, these materials were available to be used by the other academic communities in Nashville, including Peabody, Vanderbilt, Ward Belmont, Scarritt, Fisk, and A and I.¹⁰² Making these resources accessible to African American students from Fisk and A and I was unusual at this time. In 1928 Weatherford insisted "only one other library in the South" was open to black researchers, and according to Graduate School records in 1932, such an arrangement "did not occur at any of the other college for white students in Nashville."¹⁰³ It is not clear exactly what year the YMCA Graduate School's library became open to black visitors, but this was certainly the case by 1928. By 1932 Fisk and Weatherford's institution had developed a formal cooperative agreement to use each others' research facilities and also work

¹⁰⁰ "Slavery Items in the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Library," folder 1505, Weatherford Papers. One important journal series that Weatherford worked to complete over the course of the institution's history was a run of *Debow's Review*, a journal of economic and social life that ran from 1846 to 1880. Weatherford eventually gathered this series. Also one of his graduate students, Don L. Moore, worked on an analytical index of this publication during his years at the school. Weatherford later finished this volume and in 1948 published it with his own funds. Weatherford also wrote a short history of the journal's namesake, James Dunwoody B. De Bow. See W. D. Weatherford, *Analytical Index of De Bow's Review* (Santa Barbara, Privately published, 1948); and W. D. Weatherford, *James Dunwoody B. De Bow*, Southern Sketches, No. 3, (Charlottesville: Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1935).

¹⁰¹ "Reporting the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the YMCA Graduate School Held in Nashville, Tennessee at the Hermitage Hotel at Four O'Clock, June 24, 1936," p. 4, folder 2119, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰² Pellettieri to Weatherford, August 3, 1932, folder 1506, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*; and W. D. Weatherford to Clyde Stillwell, October 27, 1928, folder 669, Weatherford Papers.

together to gather race-related material and African American history.¹⁰⁴ While the Y school would specialize in materials on “the Negro in America before 1865,” Fisk would concentrate on “the Negro outside of America” for this same period.¹⁰⁵ This agreement was not simply one of words. Weatherford reported to the Spelman Fund in 1932 that “Dr. Chas. S. Johnson and others at Fisk University were occasional visitors,” and in 1933 he noted, “There has scarcely been a day in the last two years that some colored student was not in our reading room.”¹⁰⁶ The special collection there was also used by Professor Merl R. Eppse of A and I for his African American history course and by the prominent social activist and Vanderbilt School of Religion professor, Alva Taylor, for his class on racial problems.¹⁰⁷

The YMCA Graduate School’s interaction with historically black colleges took place both in Nashville and outside the city. In Nashville it cooperated with schools with liberal arts programs (Fisk) as well as vocational ones (A and I).¹⁰⁸ A and I, later to become Tennessee State University, had opened in 1912 as the land grant institution for blacks in Tennessee.¹⁰⁹ Away from Nashville and Tennessee, the YMCA Graduate School also maintained a long relationship with Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, as students and professors took an annual trip there. Weatherford had known Booker T. Washington and been supportive of his accommodationist program. After Washington

¹⁰⁴ See “Working Principles for Cooperation between the Fisk University Library and the Library of the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School with Special Reference to Material on the Negro,” 1932, folder 1504, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Anna Blauvelt, August 5, 1932, folder 1536, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford, “Changing Attitudes of Southern Students,” *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (April 1933), 149.

¹⁰⁷ Weatherford to Blauvelt, August 5, 1932, folder 1536, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁸ “Anthropology,” 1934, p. 3, folder 1873, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880–1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 113 and 208–209.

died, Weatherford became friends with—and in some ways—developed an even greater respect for his successor, Robert Russa Moton.¹¹⁰ Indeed Moton seems also to have valued this relationship with Weatherford, inviting him to give Tuskegee's 1930 baccalaureate address.¹¹¹

While it is not clear the exact year these trips first started, sometime before 1925 Weatherford began taking his students to visit Tuskegee.¹¹² It appears that the group (not more than fifteen ordinarily) were usually members of his anthropology course and that they normally spent several days there in the spring of the year.¹¹³ Interestingly this group often included both white men and women in a time when exposing the latter to black men was a very touchy issue.¹¹⁴ The groups often met with faculty there, including visiting George Washington Carver's lab, and they also had time with Principal Moton, and on occasion they gathered with groups "to ask questions about present Race

¹¹⁰ In one of Weatherford's personal notebooks he wrote "The two outstanding Negroes whom I knew better than any other were Dr. Booker T. Washington and Principal R. R. Moton who succeeded Washington. The later seemed to me the more able..." See "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," no date (unpaginated), Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

¹¹¹ R. R. Moton to W. D. Weatherford, April 14, 1930, folder 1037, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹² See George Washington Carver to W. D. Weatherford, April 20, 1925, folder 3615, Weatherford Papers; and R. R. Moton to W. D. Weatherford, May 25, 1925, folder 3615, Weatherford Papers. It is clear that Weatherford's group had been there before. Carver notes, "We are always delighted to have you come down to see us." Moton writes, "I can say in turn that no group you have ever brought here has made quite so favorable impression upon our students and teachers alike."

¹¹³ See W. D. Weatherford to Porf. Taylor, April 18, 1928, folder 3626; R. R. Moton to W. D. Weatherford, April 14, 1930, folder 1037; W. D. Weatherford memorandum to "Students in Anthropology," March 13, 1932, folder 1439; W. D. Weatherford to R. R. Moton, May 4, 1932, folder 1543; J. J. Ray memorandum to YMCA Graduate students, April 7, 1933, folder 1728; W. D. Weatherford memorandum "To All Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Students," March 13, 1934, folder 1873; and F. D. Patterson to W. D. Weatherford, November 1, 1935, folder 3659, all in Weatherford Papers. Weatherford also took pictures of his students, professors, and buildings at one of these Tuskegee trips. See picture file, P-3831, folder 17 of 20, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁴ In 1925 one woman came, in 1928 four, in 1932 one, in 1933 three, and in 1934 four. Also in 1934, the A and I graduate sitting in on Weatherford's course also traveled with this group. See W. D. Weatherford to Albon L. Holsey, March 18, 1925, folder 114; Weatherford to Taylor, April 18, 1928, folder 3626; Weatherford to Moton, May 4, 1932, folder 1543; Ray memorandum to Graduate students, April 7, 1933, folder 1728; and W. D. Weatherford to G. Lake Imes, April 16, 1934, folder 1912, all in Weatherford Papers.

Relations.”¹¹⁵ This trip was a required part of taking Weatherford’s anthropology course. Evidently students who would not have felt comfortable going to Tuskegee need not sign up for this class, with one Graduate School memorandum by Weatherford noting “all students should plan to take [this trip] if they want credit on the course.”¹¹⁶ Even after the end of Moton’s term in 1935, Weatherford was welcomed by Tuskegee’s new leader, Frederick D. Patterson, who noted that “the annual group from the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School of Nashville will be looked forward to each year with pleasure.”¹¹⁷

Trips to Tuskegee also often included excursions to a major southern industrial plant, the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO) in Birmingham, Alabama. Weatherford had been on the board of directors of this company since 1927.¹¹⁸ The company’s founder, John J. Eagan, had passed away by that point, but Weatherford and Eagan had known each other through their early work in the CIC. Indeed, Eagan had been the first president of that group in 1919. With a large share of ACIPCO’s employees being African American (roughly 1,100 out of approximately 1,500 in 1925), issues of race relations at the plant were important.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the company was supposedly run on humanitarian principles—the Eagan Plan. This scheme, which included profit sharing among the employees as well “housing, recreational, and educational innovations for employees,” according to Dykeman was apparently “all far

¹¹⁵ W. D. Weatherford to R. R. Moton, March 31, 1933, folder 1733, Weatherford Papers; and Carver to Weatherford, April 20, 1925, folder 3614, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁶ Weatherford memorandum to “Students in Anthropology,” March 13, 1932, folder 1439, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁷ Patterson to Weatherford, November 1, 1935, folder 3659, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁸ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 167–169.

¹¹⁹ See James Myers to W. D. Moore and C. D. Barr, January 24, 1927, folder 472, Weatherford Papers; and James Myers, “The Cooperative Plan of the American Cast Iron Pipe Company, History,” p. 8, folder 472, Weatherford Papers.

ahead of [its] time in industrial Birmingham.”¹²⁰ Weatherford would have been very interested in showing his students this mixture of applying faith principles to business. Thus, these trips to ACIPCO allowed his students to examine the interaction of race, industry, and religion—all key concerns of Weatherford’s.

On the 1934 trip to Tuskegee and ACIPCO the limits to Weatherford’s racial liberalism were shown. This was the tour on which the A and I graduate was traveling with the group. As Weatherford made plans to visit ACIPCO, he wrote to one of the company’s executives laying out “a little complication.”¹²¹ Since the group would be eating lunch at the plant, Weatherford wanted to work out preparations for this black man to eat separately from the white group. Weatherford noted that someone “will have to make arrangements with the colored secretary to take him to lunch. I do not think there would be any embarrassment about the situation”¹²² In this case Weatherford bowed to custom when possibly he could have stood up with few repercussions. At this time at Blue Ridge Weatherford was still working out this complex issue, fearing the serious financial loss and participation there if he pushed things too hard. It is likely that issues in the Deep South regarding blacks and whites eating together were even stricter than in North Carolina. Weatherford must have been worried about how things looked in this situation. An integrated lunch at ACIPCO—while not having the same risks that it might have had at Blue Ridge—nevertheless could have caused a stir at the factory. Moreover, perhaps Weatherford was fearful that it might upset his rapport with some of the ACIPCO executives, or he may even have been concerned reports might get back to

¹²⁰ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 168.

¹²¹ W. D. Weatherford to C. D. Barr, May 8, 1934, folder 1967, Weatherford Papers.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Nashville. No matter what his reasoning, he refused to transgress southern custom here. Weatherford's actions reveal how even a progressive southerner at this time operated in the Jim Crow South, bending to local custom.

Despite Weatherford's unwillingness to challenge the southern norm on this occasion, these field trips to Fisk, A and I, Tuskegee, and ACIPCO were noteworthy at this time in the South and an important part of this anthropology course. As one of the Graduate School's records shows, these visits were made so that students could "better understand the ed. problems and progress of the Negro."¹²³ Weatherford used these outings to expose his white students to other black college students as well as educated and professional African Americans from the middle and upper classes, likely a new experience for most of them. Moreover, Weatherford tested his students on what they saw and heard on these excursions, analyzing the various methods of each institution's particular educational program. Questions for his 1934 anthropology course included recalling certain details from these trips as well as comparing and contrasting the respective schools.¹²⁴ For example, one question asked them to state what Moton had said about DuBois's "attitude."¹²⁵ Another item asked students to "Summarize Pres. Hales' talk at A & I."¹²⁶ These trips, combined with the examinations, would have provided these students with more contact with black collegiate life than most of their other white southern contemporaries had.

The interactions between Weatherford's YMCA Graduate students and these various African American institutions also breaks down the assumption that Weatherford

¹²³ Pellettieri to Weatherford, August 3, 1932, folder 1506, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁴ "Anthropology," 1934, p. 3, folder 1873, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* William J. Hale was the African American president of A and I in this period.

simply favored vocational education for blacks in this period. At this time, many southerners and northerners, and even liberals of Weatherford's mold, thought that training that provided manual labor skills was best for blacks. Indeed, historians have been critical of northern philanthropic organizations that only aided vocational schools like Hampton and Tuskegee rather than liberal arts schools like Fisk.¹²⁷ Yet it is apparent from Weatherford's work with Fisk in these years and his later role as professor there that he clearly valued liberal arts training for blacks.

The quality of the YMCA Graduate School's other faculty varied over the course of its history. The high standards for which Weatherford aimed were never fully achieved, despite his efforts to build a high-grade teaching staff. In the early years of the school, Weatherford was the only one to really hold a doctorate.¹²⁸ The first head of its physical education department, T. P. Ballou, claimed he was a Harvard M.D. For nearly four years he served in this role before it became clear that he did not have a medical degree or even the B.S. from the United States Naval Academy.¹²⁹ O. E. Brown, Dean of the Vanderbilt School of Religion, had recommended Ballou for the position after getting to know him when the two had been YMCA workers during World War I. While it seems his teaching abilities had not raised ire, when Weatherford became aware of Ballou's fraudulent credentials, he dismissed him. The next man in that position, Fredrick B. Messing, came to the YMCA Graduate School with his bachelor's and master's degree from Hiram College and Springfield College respectively.¹³⁰ Messing

¹²⁷ See James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹²⁸ Southern College, 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 9, folder 2, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁹ Welch, "YMCA Graduate School of Nashville," 15.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

went on to receive his doctorate at the Graduate School in 1926, and served as director until 1929. He was followed by A. B. Miles in this role, who also received his D.P.E. at the school, leading the physical education work there until its closing in 1936. Thus, the academic qualifications of this department's staff never reached top-notch status, starting with a man without any college education and subsequently led by two men who finished their doctorates at the school in which they were working.

Outside the physical education work, the school for the most part depended heavily on professors from Vanderbilt's School of Religion, as well as the rest of that university, to provide instruction. For the summer quarter Weatherford also secured professors from other colleges—free from their duties at their home institutions—to supplement the teaching load. Growing out of Weatherford's experience as YMCA secretary working with southern schools, he was well connected in this region's academic circles, particularly with those professors who maintained religious commitments. Weatherford deftly used his extensive contacts and networks in the South to bring prominent figures to Blue Ridge to teach courses. Among the professors who frequently came from Vanderbilt were O. E. Brown, English professor Edwin Mims, and religion professor John Louis Kesler.¹³¹ Samuel Chiles Mitchell (father of Broadus Mitchell), history professor at the University of Richmond, was another frequent lecturer during the Blue Ridge term, spending over twenty summers there.¹³² Mitchell had been president of both the University of South Carolina (1908–1913) and Delaware College (1914–1920)

¹³¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 108. See also Southern College, 1922–1923 Catalog and Announcements, p. 9–10, folder 2, Weatherford Papers. Mims had his Ph.D, while Brown only an A.M. and B.D. and Kesler an A.B.

¹³² See "Years of Service at Blue Ridge," folder 2219, Weatherford Papers.

before moving to Richmond to teach history in 1920.¹³³ In many ways he was a southern liberal of Weatherford's mold, yet over ten years the latter's senior.¹³⁴ His courses often focused on economic history and world political problems.¹³⁵

While the faculty of the Graduate School in these early years was not particularly strong, over time Weatherford did bring in more qualified academics. In 1925 he secured Ray Erwin Baber and Willard E. Uphaus to teach sociology and religious education courses respectively.¹³⁶ Both held Ph.D.s, Baber having earned his at the University of Wisconsin and Uphaus at Yale. These were the type of professors Weatherford sought, men who would strengthen the school's level of scholarship and teaching and also raise the institution's status.

Uphaus was a proponent for a socially engaged Christianity. Don West, the radical poet, preacher, and labor and political activist, noted Uphaus's influence upon him when West had been studying at Vanderbilt under Alva Taylor.¹³⁷ Uphaus apparently taught courses for both the YMCA Graduate School and the Vanderbilt School of Religion, and West later recalled that he "took courses with Willard."¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Uphaus's time at the YMCA Graduate School appears to have been cut

¹³³ See finding aid for Samuel Chiles Mitchell Papers, #1003, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

¹³⁴ Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 59–60.

¹³⁵ For example see his courses for the 1924 summer term: "The Economic Development of the United States" and "Studies in Social Reconstruction." Summer Quarter Courses, 1924, folder 16, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁶ "Strengthening the Staff at Southern College," *Blue Ridge Voice*, April 1925, p. 12

¹³⁷ See "Interview with Don West," January 22, 1975, Interview E-0016, Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; James J. Lorence, *A Hard Journey: The Life of Don West* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 20; and Connie West, Willard Uphaus illustration and caption, *Appalachian Heritage* 36 (Fall 2008), 5 and 50.

¹³⁸ W. D. Weatherford to G. Sarah Uphaus, March 5, 1928, folder 718, Weatherford Papers. For quote see "Interview with Don West," Southern Oral History Program Collection.

short by a “nervous breakdown” he suffered in the winter of 1928.¹³⁹ In the spring of 1929 he was at a sanatorium in New York recovering, and in 1930 he was teaching at Hastings College in Nebraska.¹⁴⁰ It is unclear if he ever returned to do any teaching at the Graduate School after his breakdown.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless he went on to make a name for himself through peace work and acts of conscience in later years. Baber would also stay at the school only until the end of the 1920s, leaving in the spring term of 1929 to accept a post at New York University.¹⁴²

Baber’s decision to depart from the Graduate School reveals much about the general atmosphere among the school’s faculty and their view of Weatherford. Between 1928 and 1929 Baber wrote a series of letters to Weatherford that showed his deep loyalty to him as well as the school, but that also brought forth some criticism.¹⁴³ In particular, Baber was stressed by the institution’s financial situation at this time. In his October 1928 note he insisted the faculty was plagued by “a feeling of uncertainty and worry” because of these money pressures.¹⁴⁴ He felt that this reality was greatly due to the “lack of information” that Weatherford had provided the faculty on this subject, and Baber pleaded that a meeting among this group be held to discuss the subject.¹⁴⁵ The

¹³⁹ Sarah Uphaus to W. D. Weatherford, February 27, 1928, folder 718, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁰ Willard Uphaus to W. D. Weatherford, April 16, 1929, folder 922, Weatherford Papers; and Josh Barbanel, “Dr. Willard Uphaus, Leader of Pacifist Causes in the 50’s,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1983, D31.

¹⁴¹ Weatherford notes that he was kept on the payroll until January 1, 1929. See W. D. Weatherford to J. V. Clarke, January 23, 1929, folder 840, Weatherford Papers. It also not clear how West would have taken courses with Uphaus. The former entered the Vanderbilt School of Religion in fall 1929. Perhaps when West worked as a Blue Ridge “PW” in the summer of 1929, Uphaus taught a course then. See Donald L. West to W. D. Weatherford, October 27, 1958, folder 3825, Weatherford Papers; and “Presidents of Student YMCA’s on Working Staff at Blue Ridge,” folder 3162, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴² Ray Baber to W. D. Weatherford, June 19, 1929, folder 933, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴³ Ray Baber to W. D. Weatherford, October 27, 1928, folder 1094; Baber to Weatherford, June 19, 1929, folder 933; and Baber to Weatherford, June 29, 1929, folder 933, all in Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁴ Baber to Weatherford, October 27, 1928, folder 1094, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

following summer, in the midst of his considering a position at NYU, Baber laid out several other critiques of the Graduate School. Finances again ranked first in his list, but he also mentioned that the staff was too small, there were “so few students,” there was a “rapid turnover in staff,” and the four quarters of teaching was too heavy.¹⁴⁶ The last complaint deserves further comment. As noted before, Weatherford required professors to teach in Nashville during the winter quarters and then go to Blue Ridge for the summers. This put an intense pressure on faculty and provided them little time for their research and personal relaxation. Through the spring of 1929 there was no official faculty policy regarding sabbatical leave, but in that year the Board of Directors moved to allow every third summer free for its professors.¹⁴⁷ This heavy teaching load as well as additional responsibilities at the college did not make working at the school an easy job. Moreover Baber listed another issue, something over which the YMCA Graduate School had no control, that of the lack of support—financially and otherwise—from the Y Associations in the South. All these elements, along with personal considerations of financial security for his family, pushed Baber to leave.

Baber also brought up the pressure which Weatherford was under simultaneously trying to raise money, teach classes, and administer the school. Specifically, Baber acknowledged the “everlasting lack of money, which lack has drained your time and nervous energy too much already,” keeping Weatherford largely confined to development work for the school’s annual budget, let alone its endowment.¹⁴⁸ Also adding to

¹⁴⁶ Baber to Weatherford, June 19, 1929, folder 933, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁷ See “Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Board of Directors of Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Nashville, April 19, 1929,” p. 8, folder 857, Weatherford Papers; and Baber to Weatherford, June 29, 1929, folder 933, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁸ Baber to Weatherford, June 19, 1929, folder 933, Weatherford Papers.

Weatherford's stress was his wife's battle with pleurisy in this period. On a trip to New York to raise money, the weight of all these pressures showed when Weatherford wrote to a fellow staff member after a long day, "I'm lonesome as a dog tonight –too tired to go anywhere—Darn this traveling job. I'm sick of it."¹⁴⁹ While Julia would recover from pleurisy, her health would again fail in 1933, compounding the demands already on Weatherford. Around the Christmas holidays of 1932 the Weatherfords' family dog had been acting rather unusual, "snapping" and "jumping" at the family.¹⁵⁰ The animal was soon put down, but after an examination of the dog's skull revealed signs of "hydrophobia," it was decided that Julia and Willis be given the "Pasteur serum" series of shots.¹⁵¹ Unknowingly Julia was allergic to these treatments, developing a serious reaction that eventually left her paralyzed from the waist down. While she would live until 1957, she was homebound and became progressively less functional in the coming years. Thus, this terrible personal disaster occurred in the midst of Weatherford's efforts to save Blue Ridge in 1933 and his work with the YMCA Graduate School. It was a very hard time for Weatherford.

With Baber's position vacant, Weatherford used his relationship with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's distinguished sociologist Howard Odum to secure a new professor.¹⁵² The two had known each other through the CIC, and Odum had also taught at Blue Ridge during the 1928 summer term.¹⁵³ Writing to Odum,

¹⁴⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Herbert Sanders, November 22, 1928, folder 705, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁰ Cecile Clark to Edgar Lotspeich, March 4, 1933, folder 1725, Weatherford Papers; and Cecile Clark to Merrill Brown, March 1, 1933, folder 1661, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵¹ Clark to Lotspeich, March 4, 1933, folder 1725 and Clark to Brown, March 1, 1933, folder 1661, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵² W. D. Weatherford to Howard Odum, February 28, 1930, folder 1044, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵³ See Conference Roster for Southern Summer School, July 17–31, 1928, folder 734, Weatherford Papers; "Sixteenth Year of the Southern Summer School of Young Men's Christian Associations," *Blue Ridge*

Weatherford noted his desire for a research professor in the “field of Social Science, who has specialized on racial problems.”¹⁵⁴ Weatherford went on to request a “Southern” and “Christian” man.¹⁵⁵ He inquired into the possibility of Arthur Raper, who was in the process of finishing his Ph.D. with Odum and currently working with the CIC in Georgia. Weatherford knew Raper through his interracial interests and may also have known of his involvement in the YMCA while an undergraduate at Chapel Hill.¹⁵⁶ Both activities would have been appealing to Weatherford. After meeting with Raper in Atlanta in April 1930, Weatherford wrote requesting him to visit Nashville and the YMCA Graduate School.¹⁵⁷ But at this time Raper was just finishing his dissertation—a comparative study of farm life and migration in two black belt counties in Georgia—and believed the research could “be of value only in so far as its findings are used.”¹⁵⁸ He turned down Weatherford’s offer but concluded the letter, noting “Let me assure you that I appreciate the faith which you have in me and I trust throughout the years we may be able to work together in our common task of making life more abundant for men, of whatever color, in Southern communities and throughout the world.”¹⁵⁹ Eventually, Weatherford would secure another Odum student, J. Paul McConnell, for the sociology post. According to

Voice, June 1927, p. 11; and Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 151. Weatherford had also published a short article in Odum’s sociology journal at UNC in 1924. See Weatherford, “Training of Social and Religious Workers,” *Journal of Social Forces* (January 1924): 211–212.

¹⁵⁴ Weatherford to Odum, February 28, 1930, folder 1044, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ For Raper’s involvement in the UNC YMCA see Singal, *War Within*, 329. For more information about Arthur Raper see Singal, *War Within*, 328–338; and Louis Mazzari, *Southern Modernist: Arthur Raper from the New Deal to the Cold War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁷ W. D. Weatherford to Arthur Raper, April 22, 1930, folder 1046, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁸ Arthur Raper to W. D. Weatherford, April 28, 1930, folder 3637, Weatherford Papers. His dissertation would later be published as *Preface to Peasantry* in 1936. See Singal, *War Within*, 333–335.

¹⁵⁹ Raper to Weatherford, April 28, 1930, folder 3637, Weatherford Papers.

Odum, McConnell probably was a more suitable choice than Raper, particularly because of his active religious life.¹⁶⁰

Over time McConnell would bring some esteem to the school, leading a sociological study of Nashville's African American boys in 1931. This work, edited by Weatherford and with the collaboration of four other Graduate School professors and the aid of students there, was published in 1932 as *A Survey of the Negro Boy in Nashville, Tennessee*.¹⁶¹ The project covered the physical, economic, educational, social, religious, and emotional aspects of this segment of the black community. The findings revealed various difficulties African American male youths faced in terms of home life, education, economic opportunity, personal health, and justice, and at times the survey recommended steps for improvement. The book received a favorable review in the *Journal of Negro Education* from Henry J. McGuinn, sociology professor at Virginia Union University, who applauded the study's "candor and the scientific spirit in which the task [was] approached."¹⁶² He particularly liked that the book explained the current status of African American boys as a product of their environment rather than race, noting, "The socioeconomic factor as it relates to health is everywhere pointed out and one notes little tendency to regard health as a function of race."¹⁶³ Overall this short study provided a good picture of the challenges Nashville's young African American males faced in the

¹⁶⁰ Howard Odum to W. D. Weatherford, March 17, 1930, folder 1044, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶¹ See W. D. Weatherford, ed., *A Survey of the Negro Boy in Nashville, Tennessee* (New York: Association Press, 1932).

¹⁶² Henry J. McGuinn, review in *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (April 1933), 217.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

early 1930s and particularly their frustration at “existing conditions” resulting from Jim Crow segregation.¹⁶⁴

Some of the YMCA Graduate School students also pursued sociological studies of their own, examining Nashville’s black population for their master’s and bachelor’s theses. As migration rates from southern rural areas to Nashville increased in the early twentieth century, this city proved a particularly good place to examine urban problems. According to historian Don Doyle, Weatherford had been “Nashville’s pioneer in sociological surveys,” particularly with his early books on southern blacks and his participation in the 1912 Southern Sociological Congress that gathered in Nashville.¹⁶⁵ Weatherford’s interest was passed on to his students, and as Doyle notes, these students completed “numerous” projects on the city’s poor African American population and suggested “modern social welfare programs.”¹⁶⁶ Indeed by 1933 seven students at the school had completed their theses on this topic.¹⁶⁷ The quality of the school’s academic program in this field is evidenced by the fact that it was granted a charter in 1933 by Pi Gamma Mu, the National Social Science Honor Society, to begin a chapter.¹⁶⁸

In building the Graduate School, Weatherford not only focused on the faculty but also sought to develop an intellectual community there. Over the course of the

¹⁶⁴ Weatherford, ed., *Survey of the Negro Boy in Nashville*, 118.

¹⁶⁵ Doyle, *Nashville Since the 1920s*, 32.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶⁷ “Theses in the YMCA Graduate School Library, October 19, 1933,” folder 1729, Weatherford Papers. These included R. H. Athearn, “The Origin of Racial Attitudes in the Adolescent Boy,” (1926); W. N. Cashion, “The Need for Playground Facilities for the Negro Children in Nashville,” (1924); M. P. Chapman, “Leisure Time and Recreational Activities of the Negro High School Girl in Nashville, Tenn.,” (1932); E. P. Deacon, “The Physical Status of Negro Boys in the Junior High Schools of Nashville, Tenn.,” (1931); J. T. Hardwick, “The Economic Condition of the Negro in Nashville,” (1922); A. S. Hurst, “Play of the Nashville Negro Boy,” (nd); and D. G. McLaurin, “The Leisure Time and Recreational Life of the Negro Boys in Nashville,” (1932).

¹⁶⁸ Leroy Allen to W. D. Weatherford, July 15, 1933, folder 1924, Weatherford Papers.

institution's history he brought in well-known figures for special lectures. One of the early visitors to the school was the General Secretary of the National Council of the YMCA, John R. Mott.¹⁶⁹ Mott provided three lectures examining the YMCA's contributions to the physical and spiritual life of men as well as its offering to "World Christianity."¹⁷⁰ Weatherford also arranged for prominent theologians and preachers to visit the school in Nashville. Among these were Edwin McNeill Poteat Jr. (nephew of William Louis Poteat and minister at the progressive Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina), Edgar Brightman (Personalist theologian at Boston University), and Henry P. Van Dusen (professor of philosophy of religion and systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary).¹⁷¹ Poteat delivered lectures in Nashville in 1930, and these talks were later published as *Coming to Terms with the Universe: A Study in the Philosophy of Religion for the Semi-sophisticated*.¹⁷² These lectures posited that "Man's conception of himself" and "his conception of God" had not "kept pace" with the amazing strides in the understanding of the physical universe.¹⁷³ In essence Poteat argued that God remained relevant in this world and that people needed to expand how they thought about the divine. Brightman came for the fall lectures of 1931, and the Graduate School published these under the title *Is God a Person?*¹⁷⁴ Van Dusen, at the

¹⁶⁹ E. S. Lotspeich, "John R. Mott Visits Southern Y College," *Blue Ridge Voice*, April 1925, p. 13–14.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ For Dusen see Henry P. Van Dusen to W. D. Weatherford, October 31, 1933, folder 1763, Weatherford Papers; and "Protestant Architect," *Time*, April 19, 1954, 62–66. For Poteat see "Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr." in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 129.

¹⁷² Edwin McNeill Poteat Jr., *Coming to Terms with the Universe: A Study in the Philosophy of Religion for the Semi-sophisticated* (New York: Association Press, 1931). According to Weatherford's introduction to this volume, these lectures were also given at the 1930 YMCA Southern Student Conference at Blue Ridge. See p. x.

¹⁷³ Poteat, *Coming to Terms*, ix.

¹⁷⁴ W. D. Weatherford memorandum to YMCA Graduate School Alumni, December 5, 1931, folder 1195, Weatherford Papers.

time dean of students at Union, brought forth a series under the topic “Reflections on the Christian Message Today,” which were later published as *God in These Times* (1935).¹⁷⁵ In general, all of these speakers were liberal, ecumenical Protestants who sought to connect the message of Christianity with changing intellectual, scientific, and social trends. They were trying to make an intelligent argument for continued faith and belief in God in this era of increasing skepticism. Weatherford’s efforts to include such men in his educational program in Nashville exemplified his high vision for the YMCA Graduate School.

Chapel services also provided another venue for bringing in notable and prescient presenters. The proposed 1933 schedule for this weekly service including poetry by James Weldon Johnson, “Social Problems of Races” by Charles Spurgeon Johnson, and an update on “The Situation at Wilder” by Alva Taylor.¹⁷⁶ Taylor’s topic was particularly noteworthy because of the labor conflict in Wilder, Tennessee, at the time. Since June 1932, this Fentriss Coal and Coke Company mining town had been embroiled in a bitter dispute.¹⁷⁷ Strikes, shootings, and bombings had all taken place since that period, and Alva Taylor, along with southern radicals Myles Horton and Howard and Alice Kester had been involved in helping workers. Taylor’s opportunity to speak on this issue showed that the school was aware of such issues and was engaged in these social questions. Indeed one of the YMCA Graduate School’s professors, Dagnall F. Folger, later helped blacklisted Wilder employees to find new homes when he transferred in 1934

¹⁷⁵ Dusen to Weatherford, October 31, 1933, folder 1763, Weatherford Papers. See Henry P. Van Dusen, *God In These Times* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1935).

¹⁷⁶ See “Suggestions for Chapels,” 1933, folder 1706, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷⁷ Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929–1959* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 1–15.

to work for one of the New Deal's Resettlement Administration programs near Crossville, Tennessee.¹⁷⁸

The approach of the Graduate School was largely ecumenical and somewhat open to other faith traditions. Flowing out of the YMCA's non-denominational tradition, it was entirely Protestant in its student body and faculty. However, Herbert Kohn, the executive secretary of the Young Men's Hebrew Association in Nashville, apparently "took some training" at the school.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, the Board of Directors over time came to include a small number from the Jewish tradition. In 1931 Weatherford recommended that the Board accept Lee Loventhal and J. B. Weil. He recognized the support that Loventhal in particular had already given the college and also noted the "Jews" were a "large element of influence in Nashville and the South which we need behind us."¹⁸⁰ The support of these men and particularly the economic backing they could provide (Loventhal's family headed an insurance company in the city) would certainly have been helpful.¹⁸¹ Indeed, Loventhal was soon using his own Jewish connections to solicit funds for the school. Writing to a potential contributor in New York in 1933, Loventhal argued that YMCA Graduate School was sending out to the South and West "young men imbued with liberality of thought along religious lines, so as to break down anti-semitism that may spring up in any community."¹⁸²

After the loss of Baber and Uphaus, the faculty made some slight progress toward diversifying and gaining well-qualified professors before financial pressures in the early

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Lee Loventhal to Felix Warburg, May 6, 1933, folder 1765, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁰ "Report of W. D. Weatherford to the Board of Directors of the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School at the Annual Meeting, May 2, 1931," folder 1232, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸¹ See Lee Loventhal to W. D. Weatherford, August 9, 1938, folder 2498, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸² Loventhal to Warburg, May 6, 1933, folder 1765, Weatherford Papers.

1930s really began the process of trimming down the institution's personnel. In this period the school added a male Yale Ph.D. as well as several white women to its staff, including Ruth Coble in the physical education department and "Miss Brasfield" as the librarian.¹⁸³ Yet in 1935, Dagnall Folger, the Ivy League-trained professor, left to take work with the New Deal's Home Subsistence Department.¹⁸⁴ By May 1935 the combined faculty and staff had dwindled to eight people.¹⁸⁵ Times were tough, and the Graduate School had trouble paying its employees and instructors, providing some of the faculty "compensation" in the form of "free rent in an old tumble-down building" it owned and meals at the school's cafeteria.¹⁸⁶ Louisa Young, a white woman working at Scarritt College, later recalled having a female friend who worked as the physical education teacher at the YMCA Graduate School in this period and the hard times this woman experienced.¹⁸⁷ Eventually Young helped this woman by finding her a job with the Works Progress Administration. Others continued to leave over the coming year, and by June 1936, Weatherford and Herbert Sanders (the school's treasurer and business manager) were the "only ones left."¹⁸⁸

In the fall of 1936 the financial troubles of the YMCA Graduate School finally peaked as the school lost its building on Nashville's Twenty-First Avenue South to

¹⁸³ For a list of the YMCA Graduate School Staff in 1930 see folder 1048, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Personnel Division, June 10, 1935, folder 3262, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁵ See "National YMCA: Personnel Division, February – July, 1935," folder 3262, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁶ See "Interview with Louise Young," February 14, 1972, Interview G-0066, Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Faculty teaching for the 1935 summer term work at Blue Ridge was also not paid. See W. D. Weatherford memorandum "To list of General Secretaries in Southern Region" and "To list of Graduates of YMCA Graduate School," September 25, 1935, folder 2051, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁷ For more information on Young see Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 85.

¹⁸⁸ W. D. Weatherford to R. P. Kaighn, June 9, 1936, folder 3270, Weatherford Papers.

Vanderbilt University. Antone has ably related the details of this fiscal collapse, but a brief review of this fall is needed here. In 1926, the YMCA Graduate School Board had authorized the construction of the institution's own facility.¹⁸⁹ This move was made even though they did not have all the funds in hand to pay for the project. Roughly \$300,000 in subscriptions—from individuals as well as southern Associations—still remained uncollected. Thus, to help pay the building costs the YMCA Graduate School borrowed \$350,000 from Vanderbilt, expecting that once the construction was underway the pressure to complete the project would provide leverage in securing outstanding donations. However, as the Great Depression came and deepened, the Graduate School could not secure all of this money or find other adequate sources. By 1935 they still had over \$200,000 in “uncollected subscriptions,” with approximately three-fifths being owed by local Associations in the South.¹⁹⁰ At that same time, while they had made some progress on their debt to Vanderbilt, they still owed \$155,000 to that university. The Graduate School could not pay this money, nor could it pay the interest on the principal. Negotiations for making the YMCA Graduate School officially part of Vanderbilt were considered but broke down in the spring of 1936. In the end, Vanderbilt took possession of the former's building, Weatherford and the YMCA Graduate School Board sold their exceptional library to Fisk, the winter quarters of the school ceased, and Weatherford retired from the YMCA.

Besides the obvious pressures of the Great Depression that made fund raising nearly impossible for Weatherford and the school, several other factors contributed to the

¹⁸⁹ “Reporting the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the YMCA Graduate School Held in Nashville, Tennessee at the Hermitage hotel at Four O’Clock,” June 24, 1936, folder 2119, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

institution's demise. Despite the success of getting money from individuals and philanthropic organizations, the school was never able to raise a very large endowment. Indeed, it is unclear if it ever really had an endowment. As late as 1935 Weatherford was complaining of how he was still working to simply raise money for the annual operating budget when he really needed "freedom to undertake the larger task of the endowment."¹⁹¹ If this greater undertaking had been accomplished, the interest from these funds could have taken care of the school's annual expenses and given Weatherford more time to administrate and teach. Yet it was just too hard to get money in this period, even for someone as able at fundraising as Weatherford was.

Another problem for the school was the lack of support from Y Associations in the South, specifically state and local city organizations. Weatherford was continually frustrated by their apathy toward the school and interest in training YMCA secretaries. In 1936, as the school was at the brink of collapse, these groups provided only \$6000 toward the cause.¹⁹² As Weatherford later commented on the school's collapse, he noted that this lack of financial support "illustrates the fact that the Southern Association did not believe in advanced training for secretaries sufficiently to put themselves squarely behind it, when the going was hard in their own associations."¹⁹³ Overall, Weatherford concluded these groups did not share his zeal for an educated secretariat.¹⁹⁴ Local Association leaders without advanced training may also have feared for their own job security if this education became standard. In short, Weatherford thought his vision for

¹⁹¹ W. D. Weatherford to George O. Stoll, March 18, 1935, folder 2049, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹² Willis Duke Weatherford, "The Training Program of the Southern Y.M.C.A.'s," p. 23, Biographical Records box 218, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23..

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

educating and preparing secretaries was too advanced to gain the necessary support from his fellow YMCA employees. What Weatherford did not recognize was that he was fighting against trends larger than just reluctant southern Associations. The YMCA as an institution was on the decline as a whole in this period.¹⁹⁵

One other reason for the financial pressure on the Graduate School is a point Antone overlooked in his analysis. In 1933 the YMCA Graduate School borrowed \$60,000 from the Life and Casualty Insurance Company of Nashville.¹⁹⁶ While Antone notes that the school took out this loan, he apparently did not realize that the money was used to buy the Blue Ridge property when the Blue Ridge Association for Christian Conferences and Training went bankrupt.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the Y school took on increased indebtedness in this already financially strained period in order to save the other institution. While Blue Ridge and the Graduate School were closely connected and such a move did have benefits for the latter, this action only exacerbated its money troubles. Weatherford himself recognized this complication, noting to a Blue Ridge board member, "I do not know whether I made a wise move in burdening the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School with \$60,000 of debt in order to save Blue Ridge or not."¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, he chose to do it, and this decision did further press the Graduate School's balance sheet.

A final point Antone neglected to note in his study was that while the loss of the building ended the YMCA Graduate School's program in Nashville, the school did not technically cease functioning in 1936. The summer quarter at Blue Ridge continued on

¹⁹⁵ Setran, *The College "Y"*.

¹⁹⁶ "Minutes of Called Meeting of the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Board of Directors Held at the Chamber of Commerce, Nashville, Tennessee, Monday, December 11, 1933 at 11:45 A.M.," folder 1694, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁷ See Antone, "YMCA Graduate School," 80.

¹⁹⁸ W. D. Weatherford to F. C. Abbott, December 29, 1933, folder 1772, Weatherford Papers.

for some years, at least until 1944.¹⁹⁹ At the commencement address in August 1936, Weatherford noted that school was not dead and they would “continue to devote” efforts to the task in “the summer study at Blue Ridge.”²⁰⁰

Even more interesting is that Weatherford set up a relationship between Blue Ridge and Yale Divinity School in this period to continue “training religious workers.”²⁰¹ As noted earlier, Weatherford had been offered a job by Yale in 1924 but had turned it down to stay with the Y school. Yet Weatherford maintained close ties with the northern school in the coming years, and there existed something of a pipeline between the two, as Weatherford funneled some of his most talented students there. For example, Dagnall Folger, who returned to teach at the YMCA Graduate School in 1930, had taken two years of courses with the Y school while completing his masters at Vanderbilt in the 1920s.²⁰² He finished his Ph.D. in religious education at Yale in 1931. An M.A. graduate (1922) of Weatherford’s school, Karl Zerfoss, also went on to Yale to complete his doctorate in that same field before moving on to George Williams College in Chicago for a career as a professor.²⁰³ Jim Hardwick, who connected with George Washington Carver while in the YMCA Graduate School’s 1923 summer term, attended Yale

¹⁹⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Katherine George, October 18, 1944, folder 3787, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁰ W. D. Weatherford, “Commencement Address – Y.M.C.A. Graduate School – August 28, 1936,” folder 2099b, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰¹ W. D. Weatherford memorandum “To Gen. Secretaries in Southern States and Texas, Okla., and Ark.,” January 18, 1937, folder 2338, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰² See YMCA Graduate Staff, 1930, folder 1048, Weatherford Papers; and Dag Folger to W. D. Weatherford, August 12, 1929, folder 864, Weatherford Papers. Folger actually received his Ph.D from Yale in 1931, finishing his dissertation after teaching at the school that year. See Dagnall Frank Folger, “A Comparison of Two Methods for Training Secretaries of the Young Men’s Christian Association” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1931).

²⁰³ See Dag Folger to W. D. Weatherford, February 11, 1929, folder 863, Weatherford Papers; and “List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates,” August 1935, folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

Divinity School for further studies, spending a year there in 1926.²⁰⁴ Thus, this link between the two schools led Weatherford to make the logical move to develop an arrangement with Yale after the Y School lost its building in Nashville. The deal stipulated that the YMCA Graduate School's summer quarter at Blue Ridge would now be recognized by Yale for credit.²⁰⁵ In addition, some of these students would then go to Yale for the fall and spring semesters, where Yale would help provide scholarships for their education. In 1937 twelve students from Blue Ridge went to Yale. Among this group would be Weatherford's own son, Willis, Jr., a recent graduate of Vanderbilt.²⁰⁶ Another noteworthy aspect of this cohort was that it included white women. Agnes Highsmith, a graduate of Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, along with at least one other woman, also became part of the Blue Ridge group at Yale.²⁰⁷ Highsmith went on to finish at Yale, as did Willis Jr.²⁰⁸ This relationship between Blue Ridge and Yale lasted until at least 1939, but after that period records do not reveal any further connection.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ David R. Porter memorandum "To the Southern Field Council and Friends of the Student Association Movement," September 9, 1930, folder 3193, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁵ Weatherford memo "To Gen. Secretaries in Southern States," January 18, 1937, folder 2338, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁶ "Yale Divinity School Scholarships - 1937," folder 2346, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁷ See W. D. Weatherford to Agnes Highsmith, August 19, 1937, folder 2344, Weatherford Papers; and "Yale Divinity School Scholarship - 1937," folder 2346, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰⁸ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 120 and 188.

²⁰⁹ See "Y.M.C.A. Graduate School, Graduate Summer Quarter, Blue Ridge, N.C.," 1938, folder 2515, Weatherford Papers; and "Minutes of the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Board Meeting Held at Blue Ridge, N.C. in the Office of W. D. Weatherford," July 24, 1939, folder 2659, Weatherford Papers. This relationship may have stopped in the early 1940s as Blue Ridge again faced financial troubles as well as exigencies of World War II. Another explanation is the issue of having black students from Yale not being able to attend Blue Ridge. This concern came up in the spring of 1937 when there was the possibility of an African American male student from Yale (Edward Carroll) attending the Blue Ridge summer quarter. Weatherford corresponded with Clarence Shedd, professor at Yale Divinity, on this question and insisted North Carolina segregation laws did not make this possible at the time. Shedd responded that he understood the difficulty of this situation but he went on to add, "I must, however, say quite frankly that this is one of the problems we will need to work through very carefully if we are to find a basis of cooperative work between Yale and Blue Ridge." See Clarence Prouty Shedd to W. D. Weatherford, May 11, 1937, folder 2365, Weatherford Papers.

The story of the YMCA Graduate School provides another avenue into understanding the boundaries of southern liberalism in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the fact that the school did not advocate sweeping changes to southern racial conditions in the course of its existence, it did begin to make an impact on the attitudes of southern white secretaries and aid in the professionalization of this group. This was particularly the case among those who went to work in the college setting. By 1934, while 21 percent of the South's overall YMCA workers had received training from the YMCA Graduate School, more than half of the student secretaries had gone there.²¹⁰ While they were far from being radicals, they were sympathetic to the troubles of southern blacks and interested in working to improve conditions. In certain settings, even such a moderate stance was significant. The experience of one former student of the Graduate School who went to work at a local branch of the YMCA in Vicksburg, Mississippi, gives some sense of how awful things could be at this time. Ed Torrence (1934 M.A. graduate) wrote Weatherford in July 1934, beginning his letter, "Since I came to Mississippi I have contacted the most unreasoning prejudice against the Negro imaginable."²¹¹ He went on to explain how he had been castigated for calling the black washer women "the Colored Laundry Lady," adding that "Everybody jumped on me – they said 'no nigger could ever be a lady.'"²¹² Aside from those issues, Torrence related a chilling tale of how the older white man who worked the YMCA's locker rooms had nonchalantly revealed to him "three hair-raising stories about three 'damn niggers' that he had helped hang," telling the

²¹⁰ See "Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Bulletin," September 1934, folder 1925, Weatherford Papers.

²¹¹ Ed Torrence to W. D. Weatherford, July 25, 1934, folder 2044, Weatherford Papers; and "List of YMCA Graduate School Graduates," August 1935, folder 2133, Weatherford Papers.

²¹² Torrence to Weatherford, July 25, 1934, folder 2044, Weatherford Papers.

account “just as calmly as I would tell a bed-time story.”²¹³ Torrence was aghast at the situation there and wanted Weatherford’s advice on how to proceed. As he put it, “If I let it be known that I am sympathetic to the Negro, it will probably put me on the spot, and make me unpopular with the very people with whom I have to work and associate.”²¹⁴ Weatherford decided not to provide any guidance in letter form but made plans to speak with Torrence when the latter came to Blue Ridge that summer.²¹⁵ Torrence’s sympathetic but cautious approach to race relations seems typical of the graduates the YMCA Graduate School produced.

Weatherford’s years as president of the school were particularly hard ones for him, and they had a profound impact upon the rest of his professional and personal life. His wife was stricken twice by major illnesses, the first being pleurisy in the mid-1920s and the second, the severe reaction to a rabies serum in 1933 that left her an invalid for her remaining years. The closing of the YMCA Graduate School’s home in Nashville was a devastating blow for Weatherford. His passion had been given to making the school succeed in these painful years. Perhaps this explains why Weatherford would hold such a grudge against Chancellor Kirkland.²¹⁶ After 1936, Weatherford increasingly threw his attention and focus into Blue Ridge and the summer working staff there. He

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ W. D. Weatherford to Edgar Torrence, August 21, 1934, folder 2044, Weatherford Papers.

²¹⁶ Weatherford showed his animosity toward Kirkland and Vanderbilt in several of his letters from this period. In one letter he wrote, “The Chancellor has finally managed to rob us of our building.” See W. D. Weatherford to J. J. Gray, Jr., June 20, 1936, folder 2126, Weatherford Papers. In another he wrote that Kirkland “took from us a \$503,000 building to satisfy a \$155,000 note plus \$9,000 of interest.” See W. D. Weatherford to Jackson Davis, July 9, 1936, folder 2109, Weatherford Papers. He also complained of this treatment in a memorandum to southern YMCA secretaries noting “Well, Vanderbilt did us a dirty trick in taking our building costing \$503,000 for their debt of \$155,000 plus a year’s interest.” See W. D. Weatherford memorandum “To Gen. Secretaries in Southern States and Texas, Okla. and Ark.,” January 18, 1937, folder 2338, Weatherford Papers.

came to see that that work would be his lasting contribution. Weatherford also took on other employment in Nashville, going to Fisk University in 1936, where he stayed ten years teaching religion and raising funds for the school. But from 1919 to 1936, the YMCA Graduate School was where his heart lay. Here he taught his students to be engaged in society with their heart, head, and hands. Weatherford's dream for this failed school is summed up well in his last commencement speech in 1936:

To this end I charge you that you must be real thinkers; you must be leaders of those who are intellectually blind. You must be seers in the real sense – of seeing into the mysteries of God and interpreting those truths to men. To this end the Y.M.C.A. Graduate School has been dedicated. It has not been much interested in the secretaries' tricks of trade; it has been profoundly interested in developing insight, understanding, conviction, religious dynamic.²¹⁷

Like Weatherford's administration of Blue Ridge, his running of the YMCA Graduate School represents the limitations to his liberalism. Despite the progressive and ambitious vision for this school that would professionalize the southern YMCA and prepare trained leadership for its institutions, this dream was not fulfilled. For all the interest and work in the field of race relations through classes on the topic and interactions with African Americans and black higher educational institutions, Weatherford could not remove himself from the South's acceptance of Jim Crow and its unwillingness to challenge this structural problem in these years.

²¹⁷ Weatherford, "Commencement Address – Y.M.C.A. Graduate School – August 28, 1936," folder 2099b, Weatherford Papers.

Chapter 5—A Liberal but Never an Activist: Weatherford's Changing Views on Race, 1936–1966

During a critical period of the civil rights movement in 1964, W. D. Weatherford wrote, “In the present race struggle what a victory the South could achieve if we just had judgment enough and courage enough to come clean and quit fighting a fair chance for the Negro.”¹ Weatherford was nearly ninety years old at this time, and by this point had lived long enough to see Jim Crow’s hold on this region begun to loosen. In the same year Weatherford recorded another comment regarding his extensive involvement in race relations. He noted, “I am one of the few men who has worked intimately with the Race issue for 53 years and yet have never gotten to some bitter fight over the issue.”² While both of these statements revealed Weatherford’s lengthy and continued concern with this subject, the second remark illuminates a striking truth. Weatherford was clearly very proud that his efforts had not brought him into “some bitter fight,” but he missed the implication that he had never pushed the issue hard enough to invite serious conflict.

Despite a scale-back in his involvement in racial issues after 1946, Weatherford remained a part of the conversation and active in this work.³ Indeed, a few of his

¹ W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” [p. 16], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina. Recent scholarship, most notably from Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, has argued that the civil rights movement has a long history that precedes and extends beyond the “classical” period which is usually designated from the 1954 *Brown* decision to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Weatherford was certainly one of those persons whose work prior to 1954 can be placed within that scheme. See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233–1264.

² See unpaginated notebook titled “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

³ In a collection of personal reflections Weatherford made near the end of his life he divided his career into “Three definite phases,” (1) the period of his student work with the YMCA, (2) his interest in race, and (3) his interest in the Appalachian people. Concerning this second phase, he went on to add, “My work on the Negro has never ceased but major attention was given to it from 1910 to 1940.” See “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. One might find Weatherford’s “withdrawal” from race relations somewhat surprising at this time in light of the fact that it was in the period after the 1940s that the civil rights movement quickened in tempo and many of its greatest

contemporaries lauded his activities in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1957 Benjamin Mays favorably reviewed what would be Weatherford's last published work on race relations, *American Churches and the Negro*, concluding, "Most men become conservative with the years and do not take courageous positions—not so with W. D. Weatherford."⁴ In this book Weatherford called for the churches to catch up with the federal government's *Brown* ruling and desegregate their congregations.⁵ Mays's appraisal of Weatherford's continuing liberal voice carried weight, particularly since Mays had been a long-time civil rights activist as well as a mentor of Martin Luther King Jr. Wilma Dykeman also made a similar argument in her biography of Weatherford at the time, noting that his "liberalism" had increased with his age and citing Mays's comment in support of her view.⁶

While there is some validity to these statements, one should not be misled into thinking Weatherford stood on the cutting edge of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.⁷ In these years Weatherford remained a racial liberal as evidenced by his support of the *Brown* decision, efforts at desegregating schools in western North Carolina, and insistence on the churches taking a leading role in the equality struggle. Nevertheless, Weatherford did not take an active part in the civil disobedience efforts (the

achievements were made. Clearly part of the reason he became less involved in race was because of his new work with Berea College, interest in the Appalachian region, and intense focus there. But certainly another explanation can be found in the fact that a more active and aggressive approach to achieving racial equality took hold in these later years. Weatherford and other white liberals were often uncomfortable with these methods.

⁴ Benjamin E. Mays, "Dr. Weatherford Has Done It Again," folder 3671, Weatherford Papers. This review appeared in *The Christian Century*.

⁵ See W. D. Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro: An Historical Study from Early Slave Days to the Present* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1957).

⁶ Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 234.

⁷ George Peter Antone insists Weatherford's "liberalism seem[ed] to have been bypassed by events, and was out of place" by the mid-1940s. See George Peter Antone, Jr., "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906-1946" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969), 199.

marches, sit-ins, boycotts, arrests) that were so crucial in dismantling segregation and what King called “unjust laws.”⁸ Compared to the more influential black figures of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s like Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers, and King, Weatherford never displayed the same urgency in pushing for immediate changes. Instead, Weatherford’s strategy remained to work within the legal system, pursuing the same gradualist approach he had used all his life that focused on educating and persuading whites of their responsibility to African Americans. In short, Weatherford always remained a liberal but never became an activist.⁹

To get some sense of Weatherford’s evolving racial liberalism it is important to understand what his views were in the late 1920s and how they shifted over the coming decades. In this earlier time Weatherford still accepted southern society’s segregated order, maintaining his belief that whites and blacks could live in “parallel civilizations.” A 1927 survey on racial attitudes he completed provides a more specific understanding of where he stood on particular issues. For example, on the question of whether “The Jim Crow law should be abolished” he responded, “It would be unwise to do so for the sake of Negro at present.”¹⁰ To another inquiry regarding sexual relations between blacks and whites, Weatherford affirmed his belief that the “integrity of all races important.”¹¹ Yet

⁸ See Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” April 16, 1963, in Bruce Clayton and John Salmond, *Debating Southern History: Ideas and Action in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 95.

⁹ I am indebted to G. McLeod Bryan for helping make the distinction between an activist and a liberal in this period. Beginning in the 1950s, Bryan worked as a Christian ethics professor at Wake Forest University and involved himself in civil rights activism. In my personal interview with Bryan he noted how white southern liberals of the generation before him often did not become activists. Bryan also knew Weatherford. See Personal interview with author, July 14, 2010.

¹⁰ See “How Did Your Attitude Toward the Negro Change?,” folder 471, Weatherford Papers. For context of the survey see William H. Morgan to W. D. Weatherford, April 14, 1927, folder 471, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹ “How Did Your Attitude Toward the Negro Change?,” folder 471, Weatherford Papers. In 1936 Weatherford made another comment about relationships between whites and blacks. Writing to a friend in

in this same questionnaire he also pointed out several progressive views for the time, noting that “Negro women should be protected” (presumably from rape by white men) and that industrial jobs should be open to all persons regardless of color; supporting interracial gatherings; writing that it is “Nonsense” to think that “The Negro is foreordained to be a servant to the white man”; disavowing the idea that “The mind of the Negro is essentially inferior to that of the white man”; and advancing the view that African Americans should be provided with both vocational as well as professional educational opportunities.¹² Nevertheless, in 1927 Weatherford had still not yet reached the point where he could recognize that true social justice for African Americans could not be obtained until Jim Crow was overturned.

In the coming years Weatherford slowly began to broaden his perspective. In 1933 a man from Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College inquired into Weatherford’s thoughts about African American adolescent delinquency and the segregated school structure. At this time Weatherford noted, “Under present conditions, separate schools for Negroes and whites seem to be necessary in all sections of America where there are large numbers of the two races living side by side”; however, he did admit “Where there is a comparatively small number of either one of the groups, it is perhaps possible to have mixed schools.”¹³ The implication here is that Weatherford was not a strict segregationist, conceiving of the prospect of desegregated schools in some situations.

the YMCA he noted “Whatever we may think of it [intermarriage], this is not likely to come about in the next hundred years and it seems to me there is no particular value in pushing it when it interferes with other things.” This indicates that Weatherford recognized the explosiveness of this issue and may have had less qualms with it personally than he was willing to state more publicly. See W. D. Weatherford to A. R. Elliott, January 15, 1936, folder 3273, Weatherford Papers.

¹² “How Did Your Attitude Toward the Negro Change?,” folder 471, Weatherford Papers.

¹³ W. D. Weatherford to Ellwood F. Hansen, May 16, 1933, folder 3645, Weatherford Papers. For Hansen’s questions see Ellwood F. Hansen to W. D. Weatherford, [n.d.], folder 3645, Weatherford Papers.

His support for a dual education program was pragmatic rather than based on any idea of African American inferiority. Segregated schools in his mind were needed because he worried how black and white students would get along together, believing that if the numbers of the minority group (either black or white) were small, then tension was less likely. Weatherford's perspective was not completely out of step with the progressive mainstream at this point, with even the radical W. E. B. Du Bois in these years recognizing segregated schools might sometimes be necessary until blacks in an integrated setting could receive treatment, respect, and educational opportunities equal to that of whites.¹⁴ Still Weatherford's concern was more with how whites might react to such schools, worrying that pushing things too much or too fast might "upset" the progress that had been made on race up to this time.

Through the early 1930s Weatherford had had very limited experience with black students, and most of this contact was at the collegiate or graduate level. Yet his exposure to these young men and women changed significantly in 1936 when he took a job at Fisk University in the wake of the YMCA Graduate School's closing that spring. Organized soon after the Civil War by the American Missionary Association (AMA), Fisk—by the time Weatherford gained employment there—had become a well-established historically black college in the South.¹⁵ The AMA, founded in 1846, had been one of the earliest and most significant of the missionary agencies that sponsored educational programs for southern African Americans. Besides its relationship to Fisk, this society had also been responsible for creating Hampton Institute, Berea College,

¹⁴ See W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Does the Negro need Separate Schools?," *Journal of Negro Education* 4 (July 1935): 328–335.

¹⁵ Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865–1946* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 2–3, and 9.

Atlanta University, and what later became Dillard University. Fisk itself was created upon a “broad Christian foundation” and started primarily to prepare African Americans to be teachers in the South following the end of slavery.¹⁶

As a white man, Weatherford’s choice to work at a black university had some precedent in this period. Indeed it had been fairly commonplace for a number of white liberals—male and female—to serve in historically black schools and colleges prior to this time. In fact, the administration and teaching at these learning centers had often been led by whites from the era of their founding (most after the Civil War) through the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, increasingly the trend had been moving toward more African American faculty and control of these institutions, and particularly so at Fisk. In 1936 black professors made up one half of its faculty, and by 1945 they constituted two-thirds of it.¹⁷ By 1946 the school also had appointed its first African American president, Charles Spurgeon Johnson.¹⁸ Thus while it was not unprecedented for a white man like Weatherford to take a position at Fisk, the hiring of white faculty was becoming less common in this period.

The fact that Weatherford was also a southerner apparently made his place there even more unusual. According to his later recollections, when he “first went to Fisk [he] was the only southern white man on the faculty and many of the students resented [him] being called”¹⁹ A recent Fisk graduate of this period and later a distinguished American historian, John Hope Franklin, also provides some sense of the context of this

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁹ W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College at Vanderbilt,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

time and what it meant for Weatherford to take a job there.²⁰ Franklin completed his undergraduate studies in 1935, and in the fall of 1936 returned to teach history while in the midst of his graduate work at Harvard University.²¹ Franklin recalled the following about Weatherford's move to Fisk:

Weatherford came out to Fisk and taught, you see, when that place [YMCA Graduate School] folded up. . . . The town was very incensed. People were very upset that this man would come. You know, it goes to show his colors, he was never straight. He must not ever have been straight. One, to write a book on race relations, which was a similar kind of statement, and two, to come over there and teach. I remember that, but I can't place the dates.²²

Because of Weatherford's involvement with African American higher education and his work in race relations at this time, Franklin viewed him in positive terms as an exception to most white southerners. In 1966 Franklin would describe Weatherford as "one of the truly important Southerners of our time."²³

Weatherford's choice to work at Fisk also reveals something very important about his view of African Americans. Specifically, he believed a liberal arts education was appropriate for this racial minority. At this time many southern whites considered educating blacks to be "dangerous" because they believed it radicalized them. At best the only preparation some whites favored for African Americans was a vocational program that would prepare them for manual labor and service work. Only a very limited number of the more liberal-oriented southern whites would have supported a place like Fisk since

²⁰ See "Interview with John Hope Franklin," July 27, 1990, Interview A-0339, Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Writer John Egerton interviewed Franklin, focusing most closely on his early life, particularly Franklin's memories of his undergraduate years at Fisk University.

²¹ John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 57 and 67.

²² "Interview with John Hope Franklin," Southern Oral History Program.

²³ See advertisement flyer for *Prophet of Plenty* in Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

it provided a classically styled education that included studying Latin, Greek, and higher mathematics.

Weatherford himself, since his entry into race relations in the early 1900s, had largely been a proponent also of industrial training for blacks, particularly lauding the work of the two most widely known schools of this nature, Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute. In 1910 in his discussion of African American education in *Negro Life in the South* he had declared, "If we are to be fair to ourselves, fair to the section in which we live, and fair to the negro race, we must see that a common school education is provided for all, that an industrial training is given to the majority, and that a more thorough and complete training shall be given to the capable few who are to become the leaders of this race."²⁴ Despite his emphasis on vocational training for the "majority" in this earlier period, this statement also reveals that Weatherford—even at that point—did not completely reject a liberal arts and professional education for blacks.

Indeed over time Weatherford came to actively support the classical educational approach for African Americans. Between 1925 and 1929 he served as a trustee for Atlanta University, another liberal arts college for blacks in the South.²⁵ A few years later, in a 1933 article published in the *Journal of Negro Education*, he declared that "Every phase of life and activity demands of the Negro the same thorough training that is demanded of whites."²⁶ Within a segregated world Weatherford considered that just as whites needed education for their doctors, teachers, lawyers, dentists, and ministers, so

²⁴ W. D. Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions and Needs* (New York: Association Press, 1910), 113.

²⁵ See A. H. Yancey to Willis D. Weatherford, October 10, 1925, folder 3611, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to M. W. Adams, March 29, 1929, folder 3630, Weatherford Papers.

²⁶ W. D. Weatherford, "Changing Attitudes of Southern Students," *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (April 1933), 147.

too did African Americans. Thus the significance of Weatherford taking employment at Fisk was that this action further exhibited his interest in the professional education of blacks. It also represented another important shift in his work along the lines of race. Whereas he had worked before *for* blacks, he was now working *with* them, and as a white man, Weatherford now found himself in the minority.

At Fisk, Weatherford put into practice his interest in black higher education.

Later in his life Weatherford reflected on why he had taken the job at Fisk, noting,

I had written [four] books on [the] Race Problem, had visited scores of Negro colleges, but I wanted to have long intimate contact with an exceptionally advanced group of Negroes to find out just how capable they were, and to see whether I could really help a group of such Negroes to achieve real leadership. It was a chance to teach Negroes both on the undergraduate and graduate level and in the field of Phil. and religion.²⁷

Weatherford's comment that he wanted "to find out just how capable they were" reveals he may have had lingering doubts about black students' academic ability. Yet

Weatherford likely would have attributed environmental conditions—lack of educational opportunities and access to teaching materials and ill-equipped instructors—as the explanation for this situation, rather than any innate inability to learn on their part.

Weatherford's ten years at Fisk had a strong impact on him. He would later declare, "My experience at Fisk gave me a new appreciation of the struggle on the part of Negroes who want to be real leaders of their people."²⁸ This close association with African American students and many black faculty helped him develop more empathy for this minority group and better understand the difficulties they experienced living in the South in those years.

²⁷ W. D. Weatherford, unpaginated notebook, "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. [8].

Fisk's strong academic reputation as a school for African Americans was a major drawing point for Weatherford. Fisk had steadily been raising its standards throughout the early twentieth century, and in 1930 it became the first black college that the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools accredited with a class A status.²⁹ Thus Fisk at this time was certainly one of the outstanding colleges in the South for African Americans, and Weatherford was always interested in first-class institutions and students.

Weatherford's decision to seek employment at Fisk was also somewhat of a logical decision in light of his present circumstances. In 1936 he was at a particularly low point in his life. His dreams for the YMCA Graduate School had been dashed. His second wife was an invalid. Writing to a friend in early August of that year, Weatherford noted that he had received "a very good offer" from Fisk that was appealing because "It opens the way for me to continue things I have been doing; it keeps me in Nashville where my home is and it gives me freedom for the entire summer for handling Blue Ridge."³⁰ In another letter to William J. Hutchins, president of Berea College, he also acknowledged this option, adding that it was a "rather remarkable opening in educational work"³¹ Therefore, going to Fisk allowed Weatherford to remain close to his wife and Nashville activities, along with the flexibility of spending his summers at Blue Ridge. Weatherford's long relationship with Fisk during his leadership of the YMCA Graduate School also certainly played a part in the invitation and acceptance, as did the school's Christian foundation. Started with this heritage, Fisk continued to maintain a religious background through the early twentieth century, even preparing many of

²⁹ Richardson, *History of Fisk*, 118–119.

³⁰ W. D. Weatherford to A. O. French, August 5, 1936, folder 2120, Weatherford Papers.

³¹ W. D. Weatherford to William J. Hutchins, July 8, 1935, folder 3354, Weatherford Papers.

Nashville's black ministers.³² Considering Weatherford's strong faith convictions, this emphasis would have weighed heavily in any employment decision he made.

The exact terms for Weatherford's hiring are not documented, but it can be assumed from his later tenure at Fisk that he was brought there to raise money for the school, strengthen and develop its religion department, and teach in that field.³³ Until around 1940 the vast majority of Weatherford's service to Fisk was in fundraising, securing financial support for the overall university endowment as well as bringing in funds for its religion department. In particular, Weatherford spent the fall term of 1939 exclusively trying to help the college reach its \$3,000,000 endowment goal, of which \$450,000 would be designated to support Fisk's Department of Religion.³⁴

With his long experience in fundraising Weatherford was skillful at this task, and he employed many of the same tactics on Fisk's behalf that he had used for Blue Ridge and the YMCA Graduate School. Weatherford appealed to many of the same organizations that catered to race relations work, particularly the Rockefellers' General Education Board, and he also made trips to New York City to meet with key donors.³⁵ Moreover, in his efforts at Fisk—just as his work for other institutions—he played up the need for religious training. From his perspective African Americans students desperately needed this type of education—noting to one potential contributor, “there is great danger

³² Richardson, *History of Fisk*, 69–70.

³³ In Antone's 1969 dissertation on Weatherford he disputed Wilma Dykeman's claim that Weatherford's role at Fisk was primarily teaching. In a well-documented argument Antone clearly shows that Weatherford's early years were spent raising funds for the school and that his teaching function became more prominent in the 1940s. Yet in the process of making this point, Antone neglects to fully explore the teaching that Weatherford did do and to what extent this revealed his support for African American higher education. See Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 183–190; and Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 182.

³⁴ W. D. Weatherford to C. C. Converse, December 21, 1939, folder 3289, Weatherford Papers; and A. A. Taylor to Thomas E. Jones, June 9, 1939, folder 3291, Weatherford Papers.

³⁵ W. D. Weatherford to Thomas Jones, October 4, 1937, Box 43, folder 8, Thomas Jones collection, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collections – Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

that the Negro will turn away from religion” because many educated blacks found the “emotional gospel” they had been raised on increasingly unsatisfactory.³⁶ Moreover, Weatherford insisted that “many of the more intelligent Negroes feel that Christianity has failed” because of the prejudiced—or at the very least, apathetic—attitude numerous so-called religious whites held toward blacks.³⁷ Thus, Weatherford hoped that religion could be presented to Fisk undergraduates in a more logical and rational manner, helping these students to build what he considered a mature faith. Writing to one benefactor in 1939, Weatherford adamantly pointed out,

It is therefore imperative that in our colleges which are training Negro youth, religion should be presented as ably and as sanely as science, or mathematics, or economics. The rising generation must be shown that religion is a vital part of life, and that even the crude emotional form which he has known are testimonials of man’s eternal search for God.³⁸

In many ways, this was the same angle Weatherford had taken when he tried to offer an intellectually respectable faith to white youths while working with the college YMCA in the early 1900s.

Similar to Weatherford’s insistence that Blue Ridge and the YMCA Graduate School were critical to improving the South and race relations in the region were Weatherford’s pleas regarding Fisk. For example, Weatherford ended one of his letters to a prospective donor in 1940 with the following words, “Fisk is in the South; it is of the South. It is trying to fit students to become leaders of this great minority group in the South.”³⁹ In another instance Weatherford appealed to the Tracy McGregor Fund of Detroit, Michigan, to help Fisk develop a program for training librarians for African

³⁶ Weatherford to Converse, December 21, 1939, folder 3289, Weatherford Papers.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Charles Bransford, February 6, 1940, folder 3292, Weatherford Papers.

American elementary and secondary schools.⁴⁰ He hoped that this organization, which had aided white education in the South already, would “in another section of the South, do an equally unique and far-reaching service for the educational life of the Negro.”⁴¹ In Weatherford’s way of thinking the South, white and black, needed Fisk.

It is unclear exactly when Weatherford began his teaching on the Fisk campus, but it is apparent that this task became a more important and time-consuming function over the course of his service there. The available evidence indicates his classroom duties began at least by 1938, but it may have been earlier.⁴² In that year he was appointed a “Lecturer in Religion and the Humanities” and expected to teach one humanities introduction course each semester as well as philosophy of religion in the fall and ethics in the spring.⁴³ Weatherford was paid \$1,000 for this work, implying that he was still probably doing a good amount of fundraising for which he must have been compensated separately. This humanities course—two semesters long—became a staple of the Fisk curriculum during Weatherford’s time and a required one for all sophomores.⁴⁴ The class was a broadly based history of thought, culture, and religion, one that had “taken the place of the old required courses in religion.”⁴⁵ As an instructor Weatherford particularly highlighted the importance of religion in his classes, noting that he hoped to “show all students that religion is an organic part of all normal life.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ W. D. Weatherford to Judge Henry S. Hulbert, March 6, 1939, folder 3291, Weatherford Papers.

⁴¹ Weatherford to Hulbert, March 6, 1939, folder 3291, Weatherford Papers.

⁴² Weatherford notes in 1945 that “seven years ago” (1938) he had begun teaching a humanities course, which later became a required course for all Fisk students. See W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, October 30, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers.

⁴³ Thomas E. Jones to W. D. Weatherford, April 20, 1938, Box 43, folder 9, Jones collection.

⁴⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, October 30, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁵ W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, January 10, 1946, Box 43, folder 7, Jones Collection.

⁴⁶ Weatherford to Jones, October 30, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers. In another place Weatherford commented that the purpose of the class was to set “forth the place of religion in life.” See W. D.

Gradually Weatherford's teaching load and involvement in the religion department grew over the late 1930s and early 1940s. He went on to become the department head, worked to build a religion graduate program, and also helped sponsor extension programs for local African American ministers. By 1940 he was lecturing for four classes, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.⁴⁷ Amid his teaching the following year he was also in the process of searching to find another professor who could teach both undergraduates and graduate students; indeed, someone who could "take charge of the department" as Weatherford anticipated retiring in "three or four years."⁴⁸ In 1943 Fisk's board of trustees granted Weatherford tenure and appointed him "Professor of Religion" with a salary of \$4,000.⁴⁹ Around this time Weatherford was also trying to recruit African American students to Fisk's master's program in religion, both men and women.⁵⁰ Indeed, he went on to encourage one young woman from Hampton Institute to consider it, an action that indicated Weatherford's confidence in the academic ability of black women and showed just how far he had moved since 1910 when he referred to all black women as "girls" in *Negro Life in the South*.⁵¹

In the same period Weatherford was reaching out to the local black community, particularly African American ministers, through workshops and visits to black churches. He helped coordinate both a clergy training group that met weekly and a summer

Weatherford to Gordon Poteat, May 7, 1941, folder 2943, Weatherford Papers. See also "Humanities 150 Assignment," [n.d.], Box 43, folder 10, Jones collection.

⁴⁷ W. D. Weatherford to Lloyd Killam, October 22, 1940, folder 2794, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁸ Weatherford to Poteat, May 7, 1941, folder 2943, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁹ Thomas E. Jones to W. D. Weatherford, February 27, 1943, folder 3298, Weatherford Papers; and Thomas E. Jones to W. D. Weatherford, March 20, 1943, Box 20, folder 18, Jones collection.

⁵⁰ C. A. Chazeaud to W. D. Weatherford, March 27, 1943, folder 3296, Weatherford Papers; Benjamin E. Mays to W. D. Weatherford, March 26, 1943, folder 3299, Weatherford Papers. See also Samuel L. Gandy to W. D. Weatherford, January 4, 1944, folder 3303, Weatherford Papers.

⁵¹ W. D. Weatherford to Mildred LaVerne Streat [n.d.], folder 3296, Weatherford Papers; and Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 167–168.

ministers' institute.⁵² These activities reveal that he wanted these ministers to adopt a more "respectable" and learned religious tradition and practice. Through all of these activities it is fair to say that Weatherford was trying to impart his conception of Christianity—a liberal, middle-class version—to students and ministers. Weatherford had come to believe this was the soundest form of the faith, and like most people who consider that something is true for themselves, he assumed this version to be best for others as well.

Documents from Weatherford's files at this time indicate that he took a real interest in his students, remaining supportive of them through their years at Fisk and as they moved on to further education and work. Weatherford wrote numerous recommendation letters for them and maintained an ongoing relationship with some even after he left the university in 1946. From the surviving records it appears Weatherford took most notice of those who pursued religious studies and Christian vocations. For example, in 1943 Weatherford wrote to Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey and Yale Divinity School in Connecticut trying to get E. P. Williams, a Fisk religion graduate student and local pastor, into their programs.⁵³ A year later Weatherford again used his long connections to Yale to recommend a black woman to its theological school.⁵⁴ Weatherford also had another Fisk graduate and minister, Curtis Holland, whom he kept in contact with for nearly a decade and helped with educational and job opportunities.⁵⁵

⁵² Weatherford to Jones, October 30, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers.

⁵³ W. D. Weatherford to Lynn Harold Hough, February, 24, 1943, folder 3297, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Luther A. Weigle, May 15, 1943, folder 3300, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁴ Luther A. Weigle to W. D. Weatherford, March 15, 1944, folder 3306, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁵ W. D. Weatherford to Curtis Holland, July 15, 1942, folder 3295, Weatherford Papers; Curtis Holland to W. D. Weatherford, November 20, 1944, folder 3787, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Curtis Holland, November 25, 1944, folder 3787, Weatherford Papers; Curtis Holland to W. D. Weatherford, June

Holland apparently had been one of Weatherford's students in the religion department and went on to graduate work at Boston University (the school of the Personalists in which Weatherford had strong ties). Over the years Holland continued to ask for Weatherford's advice about work and scholarship, and Weatherford maintained this relationship through the late 1940s.⁵⁶

It also clear from the correspondence Weatherford kept from these years that many of his students were appreciative of his support and teaching. One woman, Mildred Armour, wrote Weatherford in 1942 after transferring to Howard University how much she had "enjoy[ed] Humanities, and especially the method in which [he] taught it."⁵⁷ In 1944 Frances Clark sent Weatherford a note expressing her thanks to him for his "interest" in her and help with securing a student aid scholarship.⁵⁸ She went on to conclude her letter by noting, "I wish to thank you for your kindness again and I'm looking forward to seeing you in the fall."⁵⁹ Clark was majoring in religion and was interested in completing her M.A. in that field at Fisk as well.⁶⁰ Another student, Mercedes Martin, who had to leave Fisk because of a "nervous break down," wrote Weatherford to thank him for his "offer to help" and to update him on her decision to not return to Nashville.⁶¹ Two other students also sent Weatherford letters after he left Fisk in the fall of 1946 to note their gratitude to him, with one commenting, "Fisk is quite a

10, 1948, folder 3799, Weatherford Papers; and Curtis Holland to W. D. Weatherford, July 28, 1949, folder 3801, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁶ Charles S. Johnson to W. D. Weatherford, June 26, 1948, folder 3800, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁷ Mildred Armour to W. D. Weatherford, July 18, 1942, folder 3295, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁸ Frances Clark to W. D. Weatherford, August 13, 1944, folder 3302, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁹ Clark to Weatherford, August 13, 1944, folder 3302, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁰ "Recommendations of the Department of Religion for Scholarship Awards for the Years 1945 and 1946," folder 3333, Weatherford Papers.

⁶¹ Mercedes Martin to W. D. Weatherford, September 4, 1945, folder 3313, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Mercedes Martin, September 20, 1945, folder 3313, Weatherford Papers.

different place this year without you and though you may enjoy your stay there [Berea College] we miss you no end.”⁶²

Two other connections Weatherford developed at Fisk also attest to his devotion to his students there. First, Weatherford built a relationship with W. J. Faulkner’s—the school’s dean of the chapel—daughter. Josephine Faulkner, an undergraduate at Fisk, went on to earn her M.A. under Weatherford and later asked him to perform her wedding ceremony, which he did.⁶³ According to Weatherford, this was a notable invitation. He insisted, “I don’t know of many white men who have officiated at Negro weddings. I was glad to be asked to do it.”⁶⁴

Weatherford’s connection to Josephine Faulkner was likely the result of his close relationship to Dean Faulkner. Undoubtedly contributing to their bond was Faulkner’s previous YMCA background and career.⁶⁵ Faulkner had received part of his education at Springfield YMCA College in Springfield, Massachusetts. Besides that institutional tie, they obviously also shared an overall religious outlook as well as similar social concerns. However, Faulkner was an even more progressive and active figure on racial and peace issues than Weatherford. In the mid-1940s he was member of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, the Southern Council of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and president of the Nashville branch of the NAACP, groups that would have put him among southern life’s radical edges.

⁶² Morris Brooks Jr. to W. D. Weatherford, October 18, 1946, folder 3316, Weatherford Papers; and Daisy Lee Gaffney, December 16, 1946, folder 3318, Weatherford Papers.

⁶³ Weatherford, “College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College at Vanderbilt,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ See “Biographical Notes, Concerning W. J. Faulkner,” 1945, folder 3310, Weatherford Papers.

Weatherford also developed a relationship with another Fisk faculty member's child. Patricia Johnson, the daughter of sociologist Charles Spurgeon Johnson, took her Humanities course under Weatherford and went on to serve as a "reader" for him for the 1943–1944 school year.⁶⁶ Weatherford described her as "a first class student—absolutely straight—courageous and well behaved."⁶⁷ When Wilma Dykeman later interviewed Johnson for her biography of Weatherford, Johnson recalled that Weatherford had not necessarily been "an easy person to know" but that she had appreciated the "academic discipline" he had imparted as well as his traits of "kindness, sympathy, and understanding."⁶⁸ Johnson apparently also asked Weatherford to perform her wedding, but Weatherford had to decline because of a conflicting appointment.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, what is important to take away from Johnson, Faulkner, and these other students' connections to Weatherford is that he clearly believed in Fisk and its mission and treated these black students as he did his white students. Despite his lifelong support of Tuskegee with its vocational approach to education, it is inaccurate to think he approved only that instructional style. His actions at Fisk indicate his faith in African American educational ability and achievement in a classically humanities curriculum.

Of course not all of Weatherford's students at Fisk were happy with him, and his Victorian attitude at times caused him to be judgmental of them. Weatherford particularly imposed his conception of what he thought "culture" meant on his pupils and

⁶⁶ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 181–182; and Patricia M. Johnson to W. D. Weatherford, May 17, 1943, folder 3298, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁷ Weatherford, "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁶⁸ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 182. It should be noted that these are not Johnson's own words but must be a paraphrase from Dykeman's interview with her. See also Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 241.

⁶⁹ Weatherford, "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons; and Weatherford, "College Life and Main Objectives of Work Since College at Vanderbilt," Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

held them to very high standards in behavior and scholarship. Reflecting back on the Fisk students of this time, he later wrote,

I believe the student body as a whole ranked well with most student bodies in native ability—save in their background experience. Most of them had come from better than average homes as to income—but their cultural experience was very low. To illustrate 75% of every new class came to my class room chewing gum. They were very sensitive to cultural status—I always told them by the end of the first week that no cultured man or woman chewed gum in public places. That stopped most of them. I also had to struggle with boisterousness—loud talk etc. Their home environment just did not give them cultural standards.⁷⁰

Weatherford's vision of "cultural standards" was heavily influenced by his Protestant middle-class perspective, and he saw his role as a professor to not only include attention to academic excellence but also to impart his Victorian behavioral standards on those who passed through his lectures.

As a result of Weatherford's strictness, there appears to have developed a few issues. In particular there were some concerns surrounding his grading. One of these, Betty Grayson, in late May 1943 wrote Weatherford about her disappointment in receiving a "D" in the spring humanities course.⁷¹ As Grayson put it, "My mid-semester grade was a B and from the knowledge I gained in Humanities I know that I do not merit a D."⁷² While records do not reveal how this dispute was handled, the following fall semester another grading issue developed into a major problem. In November of that year Cora Emerson, a student at Fisk, got married (taking the new last name Reese) while in the midst of completing Weatherford's humanities course.⁷³ Apparently in that term various portions of the class were taught by different professors. In the music section

⁷⁰ Weatherford, "Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors," p. [5], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁷¹ Betty Grayson to W. D. Weatherford, May 27, 1943, folder 3297, Weatherford Papers.

⁷² Grayson to Weatherford, May 27, 1943, folder 3297, Weatherford Papers.

⁷³ W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, May 29, 1945, Box 43, folder 17, Jones collection.

Reese had not passed, and for Weatherford's segment of the course she never took the exam. The following year she made plans to graduate and approached Weatherford to see if she could write a paper to make up his section of the class and receive credit for this required course. Weatherford would not allow this option but offered instead to let her take the exam. Apparently she did not follow through on this opportunity, and in the spring of 1945 she again inquired into the possibility of writing a paper to receive credit for humanities. Weatherford held to his earlier position, but this time went to her home (she was sick at the time) to administer this test. After Weatherford graded it, and even allowed another religion faculty member to evaluate it, Reese still did not pass. Thus Weatherford handed in a failing mark for her, one that he knew would also prevent her from graduating.

Yet things did not go as Weatherford expected. On commencement day Reese still received her B.A. Weatherford was incensed. He quickly wrote president Jones to complain and inquire into why this action had occurred. Jones responded to him that the dean of the college, Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, had contacted him shortly before graduation and had assured him that Reese had enough credits to graduate without needing to make up her humanities grade.⁷⁴ Apparently this did not satisfy Weatherford because Jones again wrote him several weeks later with a copy of a letter from Dean Taylor containing "information that was probably not available to you at Commencement time."⁷⁵ This note does not survive, but whatever its contents were still did assuage Weatherford's frustrations. In early July Weatherford sent a letter to his friend, Frank Porter Graham, president of the University of North Carolina at the time, about this

⁷⁴ Thomas E. Jones to W. D. Weatherford, June 2, 1945, Box 43, folder 17, Jones collection.

⁷⁵ Thomas E. Jones to W. D. Weatherford, June 26, 1945, Box 43, folder 17, Jones collection.

incident.⁷⁶ Weatherford posed the following scenario to Graham: “If a full professor fails to give any senior a passing grade in a course required for graduation in an A grade institution, can the dean or any other officer arbitrarily pass that student and permit him to graduate?”⁷⁷ Graham’s response is also unavailable; nevertheless, Weatherford continued to hold a grudge over this issue, retelling this story to Wilma Dykeman as she prepared to write his biography nearly twenty years later.⁷⁸

Weatherford dissatisfaction over this episode stemmed from several reasons. For starters he had very high standards and wanted Fisk to live up to these as well. In his original complaint to President Jones he had commented, “I have heard a great deal of talk at Fisk about maintaining standards and I have done my best to help in this matter. If this type of procedure is to be winked at, then I feel that professors might just as well hand in ‘A’ grades for all students and not bother about examinations.”⁷⁹ Indeed, based on the evidence available, Weatherford’s perspective seems to have merit, particularly since the student had not passed a required course and still been granted her diploma.

Yet personal issues, as they often do, also played a part in Weatherford’s strong reaction and lasting frustration. To begin with, Weatherford believed his authority had been challenged. As a full professor who had made multiple efforts to give Reese the chance to earn credit for the course, he felt someone had gone over his head to allow her this concession. Even more pertinent to Weatherford’s discontent over the handling of

⁷⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Frank Porter Graham, July 11, 1945, folder 3311, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁷ Weatherford to Graham, July 11, 1945, folder 3311, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁸ Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [7], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁷⁹ Weatherford to Jones, May 29, 1945, Box 43, folder 17, Jones collection.

this issue was his low opinion of Dean Taylor. Weatherford wrote the following of him nearly twenty years later:

The academic Dean—a PhD from Harvard was a black Negro who had evidently ‘eased through’! He had low scholarship standards—spent most of his evenings playing cards or just visiting. The last year I was there he passed a girl I had failed in a required course and gave her the degree. Had I stayed on I would have reported it to the Sou. Association of Schools and Colleges which might have cost Fisk her membership in that organization. It’s a fact we have to face with patience and some degree of tolerance—they are not yet mature in many cases.⁸⁰

Weatherford’s disdain for Taylor reveals both some lingering racism on his part as well as his desire to impose his Victorian middle-class worldview on others. His use of the term “they” is clearly racist because he was singling out a racial group as having a certain behavior trait, in this case what he perceived as a lack of maturity. The reference to “maturity” also had racist undertones because whites had often thought of African Americans as “childlike.” Weatherford’s other comments display classism. Weatherford had a strong dose of the Protestant work ethic in him, and his expectations of others were very high, at times unrealistic. In this case he took issue with how Taylor spent his nights socially, thinking that this lifestyle did not make Taylor a serious scholar. But Weatherford was unfair to Taylor. Besides being dean, Taylor was a historian on the faculty. By this point in his career he had published three books on African Americans in the South during Reconstruction, one coming out as late as 1941.⁸¹ Taylor had received

⁸⁰ Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [7], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons. Emphasis in original.

⁸¹ See Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1924); Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926); and Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865–1880* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1941). For more information on Taylor see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 156.

his B.A. from the University of Michigan, and his graduate education at Harvard.⁸²

Before completing his Ph. D. he had been mentored by Carter G. Woodson and served for three years with the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. In the 1940s Taylor was also likely working on his massive history of Fisk, totaling over 865 pages by the time he completed it in 1952.⁸³ In short, Taylor appears to have been no intellectual slouch.

Taylor's connection to Woodson may also explain another reason why Weatherford did not hold him in high regard, as Weatherford had some history of bad relations with Woodson. In 1924 Woodson reviewed Weatherford's *The Negro from Africa to America* rather harshly, closing with the statement "one may call the work a book of ill-assorted quotations together with a number of unwarranted opinions and conclusions."⁸⁴ Woodson had also been critical of some of Weatherford's earlier books on race relations. Woodson, and the scholarship on black history that he supported, stood as a challenge to the Dunning School that had characterized white academics' writing of southern history of the Reconstruction era.⁸⁵ In general Weatherford accepted a variant of the Dunning School's interpretation, considering that Reconstruction had largely been responsible for the "antagonisms" between whites and blacks in that period and

⁸² Richardson, *History of Fisk*, 113.

⁸³ See unpublished manuscript of Fisk University, 1866–1951, "A Constructive Influence in American Life," (1952); and "Alrutheus A. Taylor, Tribute by C. S. Johnson," June 1954, Alrutheus Ambush Taylor Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁸⁴ Carter G. Woodson, book review of *The Negro from Africa to America*, in *Journal of Negro History* 9 (October 1924): 577.

⁸⁵ William A. Dunning was an historian at Columbia University, teaching there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For more on Dunning see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 75, and 77–80.

afterwards.⁸⁶ In a 1936 review of Woodson's *The Story of the Negro Retold* Weatherford had taken issue with what he thought was Woodson's "bias against all white people," commenting that in this book Woodson had not given "any credit whatever" to any "modern whiteman."⁸⁷ He added further, "A history that is written with so much bias can hardly be called history." Therefore, it is clear from their respective assessments that each did not hold the other's scholarship in high regard. Thus, even though Weatherford never discussed Taylor's specific scholarly work, the type of history Taylor wrote and his relationship to Woodson undoubtedly played a part in Weatherford's critical view of Taylor.

A year after this Reese episode, Weatherford retired from Fisk, ostensibly to serve Berea College as a fundraiser and an assistant to its president.⁸⁸ In Antone's dissertation on Weatherford he makes the argument that part of Weatherford's decision to leave was tied to racial issues, specifically President Jones's retirement and replacement in the fall of 1946 by the university's first African American president, Charles Spurgeon Johnson.⁸⁹ Antone implied that because Weatherford and Johnson had conflicting philosophies on the race question, that Weatherford would not have felt comfortable serving under this new leadership.

Indeed it is true that Johnson and Weatherford did see racial concerns differently. Perhaps the clearest example of their conflicting perspectives on this subject comes from

⁸⁶ W. D. Weatherford, *The Negro from Africa to America* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers), 20.

⁸⁷ See W. D. Weatherford to Mary Stahlman Douglas, January 30, 1936, folder 3723b, Weatherford Papers. The review was to be published in the Nashville *Banner*.

⁸⁸ Weatherford to Jones, January 10, 1946, Box 43, folder 7, Jones Collection.

⁸⁹ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 180–200. For more information on Johnson see Richard Robbins, *Sidelines Activist: Charles S. Johnson and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996); and Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

the 1934 college textbook, *Race Relations: Adjustments of Whites and Negroes in the United States*, in which the two collaborated together.⁹⁰ In this text they expressed divergent views on the possibility of maintaining—as well as whether there should be—separate black and white cultures and races in America. Weatherford articulated his view that racial integrity and distinct cultures were very important.⁹¹ At the time he could not imagine that “amalgamation” of whites and blacks, or for that matter of any other racial groups either, as being positive.⁹² Indeed, he went so far as to use “scientific” evidence—as Antone has noted, rather “questionable” data—to show that the “[c]rossing of races” in South America of an “Indian and Negro” and of “white and Indian” had produced an offspring that was “inferior to both parent races” to support his view.⁹³ Johnson, a true sociologist, viewed the issue from a much more realistic perspective, considering the idea of maintaining a “separate” black culture in the United States as “an impossible dream.”⁹⁴ For Johnson it was not a question of good or bad as Weatherford had made it, but one of realism based on knowledge of cultural interaction and history. Johnson understood that mixture of the races and cultures was inevitable.

While Johnson and Weatherford differed on this major point, they both could still be broadly described as gradualists on race relations. Even though Johnson did not want to wait indefinitely to see changes take place, he recognized they likely would not occur quickly. As he ended his last chapter of *Race Relations* he acknowledged, “A race problem is scarcely ever settled within a generation. Despite the discomforts on the one

⁹⁰ See Willis D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson, *Race Relations: Adjustment of Whites and Negroes in the United States* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1934).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 527–530.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 527–528.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 528; and Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 196.

⁹⁴ Weatherford and Johnson, *Race Relations*, 553–554.

side and the anxieties on the other, the mills of the gods grind exceedingly slow.

Perhaps, no one living today will see the end of either the discomforts or the anxieties.”⁹⁵

Weatherford’s approach to this issue had long been the slow and steady style. In one of his sections Weatherford commented, “What ten thousand years may bring forth we do not know, but for the present, amalgamation does not seem to offer any satisfactory solution.”⁹⁶ Weatherford’s gradualism was a much slower form than that of Johnson.

Thus a divide existed between the two regarding the pace of change.⁹⁷

While Antone’s assertion is provocative and the differences between Weatherford and Johnson’s race relations philosophies are readily apparent, the available evidence does not fully support Antone’s thesis, nor the view that Weatherford left Fisk even because of his dissatisfaction over the Reese affair. It is clear that Weatherford had a good relationship with Johnson’s daughter and that he also held Johnson in high regard. Weatherford later commented, “Charles Johnson who was later elected the first Negro to be President of Fisk, was a[s] open minded and fair as any man I ever knew.”⁹⁸ In truth, Weatherford had actually been making plans to leave Fisk long before his eventual departure at the end of the 1946 spring term. In 1935 he had begun building a retirement home on a mountain peak above the Blue Ridge conference property.⁹⁹ This decision

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 554.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 528.

⁹⁷ Antone insists that over the course of the 1930s and 1940s economic and political changes in America (particularly wrought by the Great Depression and World War II) heightened the differences between Johnson and Weatherford. He goes on to insist that while Johnson had moved with the times, coming to the stance of “refus[ing] to tolerate segregation,” Weatherford had “undergone no marked change in attitude.” Nevertheless, Antone does not provide evidence to substantiate this bold claim. See Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 198–199.

⁹⁸ See Weatherford, “Fisk, Blue Ridge, Religious Discussions with Students and Professors,” p. [8], Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons.

⁹⁹ Unpaginated notebook titled “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

indicates he intended to depart Nashville in the coming years and make North Carolina his permanent residence. In 1941 while attempting to recruit another member for the Fisk religion department, Weatherford noted to his friend Gordon Poteat of Crozer Theological Seminary that he hoped to “retire some three or four years from now.”¹⁰⁰ A year later he was trying to secure a secretary for his work at Blue Ridge, noting “I am planning to move my home to Blue Ridge after two more years.”¹⁰¹ In 1944 Weatherford would have been 69 years old, basically retirement age.

However, Weatherford chose to stay on at Fisk through the spring of 1946, largely because of his interest and investment in its religion department and his desire to find a suitable replacement.¹⁰² In early January 1946 Weatherford sent in his letter of resignation to President Jones, even though Fisk’s chief administrator and Weatherford’s fellow members of the religion department apparently were urging him to remain.¹⁰³ On insisting that “it would not be good for the cause of Fisk for [him] to continue here,” Weatherford pointed out several reasons why, including his commitment to Berea and job offer there; the fact that his remaining would set “a bad precedent for retirement” at Fisk; and that the department already had five professors and it would be better for this group to have a chair “who will plan to stay a number of years.”¹⁰⁴ At this point Weatherford

¹⁰⁰ W. D. Weatherford to Gordon Poteat, May 7, 1941, folder 2943, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰¹ W. D. Weatherford to Elizabeth Parker, February 27, 1942, folder 2943, Weatherford Papers.

Weatherford also corresponded with another possible administrative assistant. See W. D. Weatherford to Coralie Witherspoon, March 6, 1942, folder 2961, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰² W. D. Weatherford to F. Q. Blanchard, November 1, 1945, folder 3307, Weatherford Papers; and Fred L. Brownlee to W. D. Weatherford, December 7, 1945, folder 3307, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰³ Weatherford to Jones, January 10, 1946, Box 43, folder 7, Jones collection. It should be noted that the same letter is in Weatherford’s own papers at the Southern Historical Collection. However, this letter is dated 1945 instead of 1946. Indeed the letter from the Fisk Special Collections is originally dated 1945 but the “5” is marked through with a “6” written above it. Based on the letter’s contents it seems clear the letter is actually from 1946. For comparison see W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, January 10, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Weatherford to Jones, January 10, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers.

had before him two options; one with Berea College and another with Wake Forest College near Raleigh, North Carolina, presumably also in fundraising.¹⁰⁵ He left Fisk at the end of the spring term of 1946 to accept the Berea position, a place where he would spend his remaining years.

In the midst of Weatherford's experience with African American higher education, he had also begun supporting the need for some political efforts to improve race relations and the status of southern blacks. In 1938 he gave his approval to the federal anti-lynching bill because, as he noted to a friend, even though he felt there had been "a tremendous amount" done to "reduce" this action, "as long as lynching goes on and there is no prosecution of lynchers, we need to take more drastic action than we have."¹⁰⁶ In 1942 Weatherford applauded the overturning of a Georgia peonage law by the United States Supreme Court, commenting to the lawyer who had argued the case, "I am highly pleased that this law that I have always considered to be unjust and unfair has been declared unconstitutional."¹⁰⁷ Weatherford also came to recognize that the tactics white southerners used to disenfranchise black voters needed to be ended. In the early 1940s he endorsed a federal law to abolish the poll tax, even writing to Tennessee Congressman Al Gore Sr. in 1943 to encourage him to vote for its repeal.¹⁰⁸ Weatherford supported this action due to his involvement in the Southern Conference for Human

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* See also C. J. Jackson to W. D. Weatherford, November 6, 1945, folder 3312, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Luther Weigle, April 3, 1946, folder 3320, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Sarah Louis, February 4, 1938, folder 2498, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁷ W. D. Weatherford to Leonard Haas, January 23, 1942, folder 2938, Weatherford Papers. See also Emily H. Clay memorandum To the Members of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, January 21, 1942, folder 2938, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁸ W. D. Weatherford to Albert Gore, May 3, 1943, folder 3783, Weatherford Papers. It is important to note that while Weatherford recognized the unfairness of poll taxes he still did not believe in the complete enfranchisement of all citizens. In a discussion of this issue at Blue Ridge in 1941 he noted he "would favor an educational qualification for all voters, black and white, to lift the level of our voting public." See "Politics and Negro Discussed," newspaper clip [1941], folder 2861, Weatherford Papers.

Welfare, a progressive group of southern liberals that had begun meeting in 1938 to address the South's economic and social issues.¹⁰⁹ While Weatherford remained on the periphery of this organization, never taking an active role in its leadership, his connection to it and his support of these other activities placed him among this period's leading southern progressives.

Also attesting to Weatherford's prominent place among southern liberals of this era was his participation in the Carnegie-Myrdal study on race. In 1939 he, along with "a limited number of carefully selected individuals of prominence," received an invitation to submit their autobiographical account of how they came to enter race relations to one of the project leaders.¹¹⁰ This study, eventually published in 1944 as *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, was led by the Swedish social economist, Gunnar Myrdal, and financed by the New York Carnegie Corporation.¹¹¹ The tome, made possible through the aid of dozens of researchers and assistants, totaled nearly 1,500 pages and took nearly five years to complete. Along with the numerous facts on the history and present conditions of African Americans and white attitudes toward this group, Myrdal insisted there was a "dilemma" that characterized American society.¹¹² On the one hand Americans celebrated and held to an idealistic view of freedom and equality for all, growing out of the country's founding documents and heritage. Yet at odds with this vision was the truth that many whites—southern and northern—thought

¹⁰⁹ James A. Dombrowski memorandum, May 1, 1943, folder 3782, Weatherford Papers. For information on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare see Thomas A. Krueger, *And Promises to Keep: The Southern Conference for Human Welfare, 1938–1948* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

¹¹⁰ Ralph J. Bunche to W. D. Weatherford, October 23, 1939, folder 2601, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹¹ Gunnar Myrdal, et al, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944).

¹¹² See David W. Southern, "An American Dilemma Revisited: Mrydalism and White Southern Liberals," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 75 (Spring 1976): 182–197; esp. 182.

they were superior to African American people. Nevertheless, Myrdal was optimistic that eventually American higher ideals would win out, and that the current structures of racial discrimination would pass away.

While Weatherford was requested to submit a summary of his race relations involvement and history, his contribution was insignificant, perhaps because he was almost overwhelmed with work. Weatherford sent in a ten-page sketch he titled “My Experience in Race Relations”—something he admitted to a friend was rather hastily written on a rainy day while he was traveling in Washington, D. C.¹¹³ In this short paper Weatherford revealed a certain optimism and pride in his race relations work, particularly highlighting his activities at Blue Ridge and the YMCA Graduate School, as well as his written works on the subject.¹¹⁴ *An American Dilemma* does not seem to have pulled anything directly from Weatherford’s reflection piece, and indeed, his other published works are only cited a handful of times, mainly from his and Johnson’s *Race Relations* textbook.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, his participation shows that he was viewed as a key player in this field at the time.

During this period of the late 1930s and early 1940s Weatherford also remained active in the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, later becoming a charter member of its successor organization, the Southern Regional Council.¹¹⁶ Chapel Hill sociologist Howard Odum had been the driving force behind this new group, nearly getting it off the ground in 1938 before the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, New Deal programs,

¹¹³ W. D. Weatherford to “Miss Clark,” nd, folder 2601, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁴ W. D. Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” [1939], folder 2601, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁵ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 563, 564, 1215, and 1230.

¹¹⁶ Charles S. Johnson and Howard W. Odum to W. D. Weatherford, February 1, 1944, folder 3667, Weatherford Papers; and Inez B. Tillison to W. D. Weatherford, March 12, 1947, folder 3798, Weatherford Papers.

and World War II sidetracked his idea.¹¹⁷ During Odum's initial plans in 1938 he consulted with Weatherford, seeking his support and ideas, as well as inviting him to take a place on the national committee of this emerging organization.¹¹⁸ Weatherford was interested in the prospects of this new agency that would expand the work of the CIC, adding a broader attention to economic and rural life to go with the CIC's emphasis on race relations. For Odum, this regionalist approach would address the interconnected problems of race and economics.

However, the Southern Regional Council did not become organized in the way Odum anticipated. Indeed, it was by way of a rather circuitous route that grew out of Jessie Daniel Ames's—Director of Women's Work for the CIC and Executive Director of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching—efforts to reinvigorate the CIC in this period.¹¹⁹ Ames had partnered together with Gordon Blain Hancock, the African American Virginia Union University sociologist, to aid in this process. Out of this connection Hancock had helped organize a group of fifty-seven southern black men in Durham, North Carolina, on October 20, 1942, that put out what became known as the "Durham Manifesto." This document acknowledged that these men were "fundamentally opposed to the principle and practice of compulsory segregation" but also acknowledged that it was "both sensible and timely" to focus then

¹¹⁷ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 302.

¹¹⁸ Howard W. Odum to W. D. Weatherford, May 25, 1938, folder 2508, Weatherford Papers; Howard W. Odum to W. D. Weatherford, June 4, 1938, folder 2508, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Howard W. Odum, December 19, 1938, folder 2508.

¹¹⁹ Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 302–312. See also Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

on specific problems of racial discrimination rather than trying to end Jim Crow.¹²⁰ In subsequent interracial meetings following this declaration, as white leaders of the race problem attempted to respond, Ames's plan to hold the CIC together was thwarted as Odum's regionalist scheme seemed to fit the mood of the times. Thus Odum's vision would finally take effect in the fall of 1943 and early winter of 1944. The new group would attempt to be more biracial than the previous CIC, yet at its inception it still would not call for an end to segregation, a fact that would hamper this organization in the coming years.¹²¹

This issue of segregation was a major dividing point among white southern liberals. Many were fearful that pushing too hard against this institution would disrupt the progress that had already been made. For those who favored challenging this structure, Jim Crow was seen as the key impediment to further progress on race. For them, equality could not exist within segregation, and this system had to be abolished.

Until this time Weatherford himself had been unwilling to publicly call for abolishing Jim Crow. Nevertheless, there is evidence that in 1943 he began to more seriously entertain the notion. In June of that year he attended the "First Annual Institute of Religion" at Howard University's School of Religion.¹²² This conference brought together sixty professors, ministers, and theologians from twelve states, fourteen colleges and universities, and nineteen churches to examine the topic "The Christian Imperative

¹²⁰ Quoted in Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 306.

¹²¹ Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 311–316.

¹²² See "Proceeding of The First Annual Institute of Religion," June 7–12, 1943, folder 3330, Weatherford Papers. Several papers from this conference were also published in *The Journal of Religious Thought*, 2 (Autumn-Winter 1945): 1–59.

and Race Relations.”¹²³ The participants primarily were African American, coming from historically black colleges and congregations. Weatherford, as the head of Fisk’s religion department, was invited as that university’s representative. Like the other participants he shared a Christian emphasis and recognized his faith compelled him to address this social issue.

At the gathering, different groups met to hear and discuss particular papers, with the entire body meeting in the evenings and on the last day for further conversation and debate. Out of this general assembly a statement was issued with several proposals. This declaration included the following words:

It is our judgment that race relations in America do not conform to the demand of the Christian ethic. The differentiation of peoples by the mere fact of race, however equal the treatment, falls below the demands of the Christian ethic. We, therefore, cannot give our endorsement to any proposals which seek merely to improve existing conditions while, at the same time perpetuating the pattern of subordination and superordination. The Christian ethic admits no pattern of behavior which denies the essential dignity of personality.¹²⁴

The resolutions adopted by the Institute were wide ranging but particularly focused on the role Christian leaders and the church had in improving racial issues. The conference body specifically called for “equality of membership and fellowship” among races in local congregations; “that the churches teach the truth about the myth of racism and remove from all their methods and materials whatever tends to inculcate this myth and to include the facts about the contributions of non-white peoples to culture and civilization”; and went on to “propose the use of mass action by church groups. . . in protest against

¹²³ Proceedings of Institute of Religion, p. 2, folder 3330, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15. The last three words of this paragraph were words Weatherford often used, and imply a reference to Personalism.

definite and concrete evils in the community.”¹²⁵ Moreover, it encouraged churches to “employ legal action for the repeal” of racist laws and “the altering of such legal practices as block justice and prevent racial minorities from enjoying their rights”; urged “every minister . . . to exercise his rights as an American citizen, recognizing the risks involved and that he encourage others so to do”; and pressed churches to provide “encouragement” and financial support to those “leaders who unselfishly and courageously work for a fundamental change in the present state of race relations.”¹²⁶ Finally, the conference statement addressed the American economic system, questioning “seriously whether” the Christian ethic can be practiced “in a true sense under competitive capitalism.”¹²⁷ In effect the Institute’s pronouncement challenged segregation and supported civil rights activism, calling for the church to lead the fight in ending this structure.

Weatherford’s exact reaction to these declarations is unclear. Other than noting his presence in leading one of the morning’s devotions, his name is not mentioned in any of the proceedings.¹²⁸ Yet the wording of the Institute’s concluding statement leads one to suspect that it represented the group’s consensus.¹²⁹ Furthermore, since Weatherford’s personality and vocal style did not lead him to remain quiet when he disagreed, it seems safe to presume he was in general accord with the Institute’s pronouncements. Indeed, Weatherford’s notes from this meeting indicate that he may have taken part in

¹²⁵ Proceedings of Institute of Religion, p. 16–18, folder 3330, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Just prior to listing the resolutions the proceedings included the following statement: “The proposals listed below as adopted by the Institute represent for the most part recommendations made by combined Groups III and IV . . .” of which Weatherford was a part. See *Ibid.*, p. 15.

drafting some of these resolutions. On one page entitled “What do we want to do?” he wrote,

We desire to establish the principle that there be no forced segregation in society or any of its phases. The Christian ethic demands that every person should be required to accept this principle as a basis of membership in the church. It demands also that every candidate for the ministry shall be required to accept this bearing of the Christian ethics. That the church should teach the truth about the myth of race. That the church apply this principle of equality of races in running its institutions—educational, economic, etc. The church should use its influence to remove all laws which violate the rights of minorities according to the Christian Ethic.¹³⁰

These strong words look very similar to what the Institute produced at the conference’s end.

The subject of non-violent resistance was also discussed at this gathering. In particular, on another page of Weatherford’s notes, he jotted down a reference to the “March on Washington program of non-violent disobedience.”¹³¹ Beginning in 1941 A. Phillip Randolph had formed the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) as an all-black nonviolent protest group that intended to gather in the nation’s capital to press for civil rights.¹³² The initial event in 1941 was canceled after Randolph secured an order from the Roosevelt administration preventing companies holding defense contracts from discriminating against African American workers. Nevertheless, Randolph’s organization continued to remain active, and in the summer of 1943 had made plans for another march. Weatherford’s notes relate to this latter affair, and imply a somewhat hesitant endorsement of this approach, pointing out that participants who break laws must

¹³⁰ W. D. Weatherford, “What do we want to do?,” folder 3331, Weatherford Papers.

¹³¹ Untitled notes by W. D. Weatherford, [1943], folder 3331, Weatherford Papers.

¹³² See Egerton, *Speak Now*, 213–216; and August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 11, 15, and 21.

be willing to face the consequences. He wrote, "We suggest therefore that any who[se] conscience forces them to obey a higher law of love, must do so with a full determination to submit to whatever the laws of society may impose, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, for in so doing we believe they will best demonstrate the truth of their position."¹³³ In the end Weatherford and the Institute's declarations did not spawn any major achievements, but this gathering did represent a growing movement to end segregation. While it still remained uncertain how far Weatherford would go to make these resolutions a reality, he apparently was contemplating a world without Jim Crow.

Weatherford's consideration of directly challenging Jim Crow in 1943 begs the question of the timing of this decision. Among the many forces operating on him then, two in particular deserve recognition. First, Weatherford had been serving Fisk for seven years by this point and certainly would have been more attuned to African American attitudes. Secondly, in 1943 the United States was in the midst of World War II and just emerging from the Great Depression. This war, just as World War I had pushed along the issue of race relations in the late 1910s, certainly brought the issue to fore again.

Just prior to Weatherford's participation at the Howard conference he also seems to have been slightly connected to the NAACP and its racial justice work, perhaps spurring a new perspective on his part. His fellow Fisk faculty member, W. J. Faulkner, was the president of the local chapter, and in April 1943 the branch sponsored a visit from A. Phillip Randolph to speak in Nashville.¹³⁴ While it is clear Weatherford received an invitation to that event, his attendance is unconfirmed. Moreover, the extent of his

¹³³ Untitled notes by Weatherford, [1943], folder 3331, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁴ See NAACP invitation postcard to W. D. Weatherford, April 20, 1943, folder 3666, Weatherford Papers.

association with this organization, and whether he was actually a member, is also unknown. Likely he was not involved because he may have feared being connected to what many white southerners would have seen as a radical organization. Nevertheless, in future years he provided some limited support for the NAACP, standing behind its Legal Defense Fund that sought to bring racial justice through judicial cases.¹³⁵ His backing of this group would have made logical sense since he would have viewed its approach as a proper and “constructive” one to changing race relations.

Weatherford’s loose tie to the NAACP and his participation in the 1943 Howard gathering may also explain two of his subsequent activities along the lines of race. In 1946 he wrote bishop Paul B. Kern of the Methodist Publishing House of an “urge” weighing on his “soul.”¹³⁶ Weatherford began the letter by noting his long history in race relations, even making the bold proclamation that he had “studied the question more intensely . . . than almost any other white man in America.”¹³⁷ He went on to insist that he thought the “time [was] ripe” for the “Methodist Church [to] be the instrument to bring Christianity as a whole to a new and vital outlook on this whole question.”¹³⁸ What Weatherford wanted to do was to have the opportunity, over a five year period, to “voice this message”—the exact program was never made explicit—in all of the annual Methodist conferences and in this denomination’s most prominent congregations.¹³⁹ His approach was cautious and “constructive,” he assured the bishop, one he hoped could “be

¹³⁵ The “Committee of 100” in support of the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc. memorandum, March 15, 1965, folder 3878, Weatherford Papers. This form letter begins “Dear Friend” and is a request for monetary support for this organization’s legal work in Alabama at the time. Therefore it seems likely Weatherford must have had some connection to this group to have received this letter, perhaps even donating funds prior to this time.

¹³⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Paul B. Kern, ca. 1946, folder 3318, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

done with courage and directness without arousing too much antagonism.”¹⁴⁰ Noting that he already was working with Berea at the time and not searching for new employment, he made the point that he still felt “this urge in [his] soul,” believing that such an approach “might have some aspects of a Wesleyan Revival, or a Lutheran Reformation.”¹⁴¹ While Weatherford’s vision apparently never materialized, this setback did not dissuade him from still believing that the church was the best place from which racial progress could proceed.

The church and race also remained on Weatherford’s mind at this time because of a book he was just bringing to completion. Since 1932 Weatherford had been working on a project examining the attitudes and programs various Christian denominations had held toward African Americans during slavery.¹⁴² This work was just one of a series of studies on race that were in progress at this time at the YMCA Graduate School. By 1936 Weatherford had finished this “source book” and was seeking to have it published.¹⁴³ The text apparently contained ten chapters, looking at that “attitudes” of the Church of England’s Society Promoting Christian Knowledge and Society for Propagation of the Gospel, Quakers, Catholics, Protestant Episcopal Church, Lutherans, Methodist Episcopal Church, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and “smaller

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² See “Y.M.C.A. Graduate School Studies in Social and Religious Engineering” book list, 1932, folder 1529d, Weatherford Papers; and “Research in the Attitudes of the Southern Churches Toward the Negro, Particularly During the Slave Period,” January 28, 1932, folder 3209, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford would also cite this manuscript in the book he co-authored with Johnson in 1934. See Weatherford and Johnson, *Race Relations*, 215.

¹⁴³ W. D. Weatherford to G. L. Worthington, April 1, 1936, folder 3661, Weatherford Papers. Worthington worked with the Historical Publishing Company in Charlottesville, Virginia. Weatherford also submitted the manuscript to the eminent University of North Carolina Press. See W. T. Couch to W. D. Weatherford, April 4, 1936, folder 3661, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to W. T. Couch, April 9, 1936, folder 3661, Weatherford Papers; and W. T. Couch to W. D. Weatherford, April 16, 1936, folder 3661, Weatherford Papers.

denominations.”¹⁴⁴ However, his efforts to put this work into print came to no avail in the 1930s.

Sometime thereafter Weatherford resumed his work on this project. By the summer of 1944 he completed a new draft that included the addition of a “full introductory chapter on what the leading churches are now doing and a closing chapter on the spirit and program which the hour demands.”¹⁴⁵ In this last section, as he told one friend, he “pleaded that every Christian Church open its doors to all seekers after God without discrimination as to race, color, or creed,” which he described as “my conviction of our present Christian duty.”¹⁴⁶ Essentially, Weatherford was calling white churches to desegregate their congregations, a very progressive idea for the 1940s. How much the Howard conference impacted this view and the additional chapters in his book are unclear, but the timing of these new sections indicates there was likely some connection.

Through the mid-1940s Weatherford continued searching for a publishing house that would accept his manuscript. He returned again to Nolan Harmon, Jr., now of the Methodist Abingdon-Cokesbury Press (Harmon had been with the Historical Publishing Company in 1936 when Weatherford originally sent it there) as well as to University of North Carolina Press.¹⁴⁷ Weatherford must have thought that these agencies would now reconsider accepting it because of the added material, but again each organization declined. In the coming years Weatherford’s study was also turned down by Doubleday & Company, Abingdon Press, and even by his old standby publisher, Association Press

¹⁴⁴ Weatherford to Worthington, April 1, 1936, folder 3661, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁵ W. D. Weatherford to Nolan Harmon, Jr., November 13, 1944, folder 3303, Weatherford Papers. See also W. D. Weatherford to Thomas Jones, July 28, 1944, Box 43, folder 17, Jones Collection.

¹⁴⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Ed King, February 3, 1948, folder 3800, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁷ W. D. Weatherford to Nolan B. Harmon, Jr., December 12, 1944, folder 3303, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Alice T. Paine, December 4, 1945, folder 3313, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Alice T. Paine, January 17, 1946, folder 3319, Weatherford Papers.

of the YMCA.¹⁴⁸ Most of these publishing houses were fearful about the marketability of Weatherford's book, a concern that perhaps was warranted. Aside from the introductory and final chapter the study was rather dull, making the majority of the book a chore to read. Eventually in 1956 Weatherford made an agreement with The Christopher Publishing House of Boston to publish his book, a deal which required him to front \$1950 of his own money for the project.¹⁴⁹ *American Churches and the Negro: An Historical Study from Early Slave Days to the Present* was published in 1957.

An event three years before also made an impact on this final edition. On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down its epochal decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, declaring that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. Just over a year later the Court issued a follow-up ruling proclaiming educational institutions should proceed to integrate "with all deliberate speed."¹⁵⁰ Of course, the actual integration of educational facilities was still a long time in coming. The Court's decision soon thereafter unleashed a massive resistance by southern whites.¹⁵¹ White Citizens' Council began appearing across towns and cities in the South, and by 1956 nineteen southern U. S. senators and eighty-one congressmen had signed the Southern Manifesto declaring their opposition to the Court's ruling. Weatherford, still in search of

¹⁴⁸ Clarkson N. Potter to W. D. Weatherford, June 20, 1951, folder 3804, Weatherford Papers; Emory Stevens Bucke to W. D. Weatherford, September 10, 1956, folder 3813, Weatherford Papers; and L. K. Hall to W. D. Weatherford, January 10, 1947, folder 3797, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁹ Arthur J. Christopher to W. D. Weatherford, September 18, 1956, folder 3667, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁰ Clive Webb, ed., *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xi.

¹⁵¹ See George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2006); Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945–1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 187–222; and Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

a publisher up until 1956, took the *Brown* decision into consideration as he again added material to bring his *American Churches and the Negro* up to date.

This book proved to be complex and somewhat disjointed because of the two revisions that took place after the original 1936 manuscript. The addition in the 1940s, which appears to include most of the last two chapters eventually published, highlighted the context of the United States in World War II, lauded democracy, and insisted that if America wanted to hold its prominent place in the world, then it needed to address its race problem.¹⁵² These pages also showed how the churches must act in new ways because of the changing times. After the *Brown* decision, Weatherford adjusted his book to fit with this momentous court decision and its challenge to segregation. These changes that Weatherford made, while making the book more relevant for the times, did not add to its readability.

The book had several objectives. In its foreword Weatherford described his fourfold purpose as follows: 1) Determine how much white churches knew about blacks and how interested they were in evangelizing this group in the antebellum period; 2) Find out to what extent southern planters “understood their Negroes better than the present-day church members do”; 3) List the accomplishments and programs that the major Christian denominations were currently supporting that “express interest and concern for the religious life” of African Americans; and 4) Provide a call for action for the present.¹⁵³

Weatherford intended his audience to be largely white southern church people, but in the

¹⁵² Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 283, and 288–290. For example, Weatherford notes that beyond Christianity “our ideals of democracy force us to give a fuller and more meaningful status to the Negro,” going on to point out the fears of “Nazism,” “Fascism,” and “Hitlerism” if the United States failed to do so.

¹⁵³ Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 17–21.

last chapter Weatherford expanded his message to include all Americans.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the fact that he appealed not only to people of the southern region but to those throughout the nation justified the study's title, *American*.

Weatherford made two basic arguments in *American Churches in the Negro*. First was the original point he had been trying to make in 1936, that white southern church people had treated African Americans (free and enslaved) with more concern in the pre-Civil War era than they had since then. Weatherford showed that in the earlier period slaves and whites often belonged to the same churches and worshipped together where—despite segregated seating—they sang the same songs, heard the same sermons, and took communion together.¹⁵⁵ Southern denominations after 1865 had become highly segregated, providing very little interaction between white and black Christians. Thus the implication Weatherford emphasized, as he noted to one prospective reader, was that present-day white southerners “are much more indifferent to the Negro than our antebellum ancestors.”¹⁵⁶ For Weatherford, pointing out this past “southern tradition” was a strategy for making white southerners rethink how their churches excluded African Americans currently. He noted, “It is my hope that this study will show that a larger exchange of religious fellowship is in keeping with the very best traditions of the Old

¹⁵⁴ An example of Weatherford's focus on southerners is found in his foreword where he writes, “Since most southern people have a high reverence for the great leaders of the Old South, and since most of us have a nostalgic appreciation of the finer elements in that old southern civilization, it seems reasonable to believe that a comparison of the attitude of the early leaders with the attitude of the average present-day church member might help to bring some sanity and poise into present-day thinking.” However by the end of the book he writes, “Once again this is not a sectional matter; North and South, East and West, the Christian Church conforms to caste . . .” *Ibid.*, 16 and 292.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. Historical scholarship supports Weatherford's perspective here. Indeed, scholars have recognized the “biracial” nature of churches in the antebellum period. See John B. Boles, ed., *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740–1870* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), esp. 1–2.

¹⁵⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Mable Gillespie, November 28, 1958, folder 3429, Weatherford Papers.

South.”¹⁵⁷ Weatherford looked somewhat nostalgically at the past, downplaying the negative aspects and impact of slavery, and emphasizing the religious sincerity, honesty, and “well-intentioned” motives of slaveholders.¹⁵⁸ His approach was very much in keeping with the way he had handled things before.

The other argument that Weatherford made came as a result of the changes taking place in the South and the world of the 1940s and 1950s. Frank Porter Graham, writing the book’s introduction, acknowledged that it was Weatherford’s contention that the churches needed “not only to catch up” with the federal government’s stance on civil rights but “to lead the way in the building of spiritual communities of equal freedom, dignity and opportunity in local congregations and in the world neighborhood of human brotherhood under the Fatherhood of one God.”¹⁵⁹ After a laborious treatment of antebellum church attitudes and these denominations’ current efforts, Weatherford asserted the churches in 1957 still had a long way to go to bring racial justice. He insisted, “We are at the parting of the ways. The Christian forces of America simply must see to it that the Negro is accorded a full status of a citizen and a man. This demands a new spirit, a new attitude, a new fellowship.”¹⁶⁰ For Weatherford this meant that white churches should desegregate their congregations, be willing to invite black ministers as guests in their pulpits, and lead racial justice work.¹⁶¹ White Christians in general should also “want economic equality, equal pay for equal work, and no discrimination in employment on account of race or creed” as well as “equal justice

¹⁵⁷ Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 21.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁵⁹ See Frank P. Graham’s introduction to *Ibid.*, 11–12.

¹⁶⁰ Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 283.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 286, 295, and 296.

before the law,” “equality” in education, and “*equal respect and courtesy to all men, white and black.*”¹⁶² In short, Weatherford called for an end to segregation within the white churches and endorsed the idea that these Christians should also help lead the fight to end this institution in American society.

In *American Churches and the Negro* Weatherford addressed segregation from the position he had always approached the issue of race relations, a religious perspective. He believed this foundation provided the moral and practical impetus for change. As he noted to one philanthropic organization’s representative from whom he was seeking funding to make this book available for wider circulation, “You cannot change modes of thought and social action by law or force alone. There is needed an agency that can change men’s minds.”¹⁶³ Weatherford went on to insist that the church had “two great advantages,” namely that “it can take the religious high ground of brotherhood, and second because it is indigenous to every section of America, it speaks to each section and cannot be accused of being an outside voice in any section.”¹⁶⁴ In particular on his second point, as a long-time southerner, Weatherford realized the risk of being labeled an outside agitator.

Beyond his belief that the church was the best mechanism for change, Weatherford also considered its place in society to be at stake if it forswore its task to address racism. For Weatherford, a new attitude toward race relations was critical to the “future of Christianity.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, he was very concerned about the church’s image and

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 291. Italicized in original.

¹⁶³ W. D. Weatherford to B. J. Hardwood, December 12, 1956, Record Group No. 9, Box 1, folder 8, W. D. Weatherford collection, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 300.

its status in the social order, perhaps more so than over what was actually being done for blacks. In 1956 he commented to one friend, "I am greatly concerned lest the churches should lag behind in the forward movements being made in interracial understanding. That, it seems to me, would be a calamity, which religion cannot afford to have come about."¹⁶⁶ Religion, again, always remained above any other single issue for Weatherford.

Weatherford wrote *American Churches and the Negro* in a style very similar to that of his other books. Once more he was trying to educate whites (but this time not only southerners) of the past and present conditions and call for action. Yet what made this book different from his previous ones on race was that now Weatherford recognized that segregation must be attacked in the churches and in society. Circumstances had changed—particularly with the effects World War II and *Brown* had wrought. Nevertheless, Weatherford still offered no political program to dismantle Jim Crow, nor did he make any mention of opposing the Southern Manifesto.¹⁶⁷ He also remained focused on what whites could do for blacks rather than on what the two groups could accomplish together. Whereas such an approach had been at the forefront of southern liberalism in 1910 with *Negro Life in the South*, this was no longer the case in 1957. Weatherford had fallen behind the curve.

¹⁶⁶ W. D. Weatherford to A. B. Cash, August 28, 1956, folder 3513, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶⁷ The Southern Manifesto, a document signed by the vast majority of southern senators and congressmen challenging the *Brown* decision, was issued on March 12, 1956. Weatherford did not make his agreement with The Christopher Publishing House until September 18, 1956. Weatherford was clearly aware of the Southern Manifesto and had even been in correspondence with Abingdon Press as a possible publisher with the consideration of Senator John Sparkman of Alabama writing a preface. The editor at Abingdon Press advised against Sparkman taking on this role because he had signed the Southern Manifesto. See Emory Stevens Bucke to W. D. Weatherford, September 10, 1956, folder 3813, Weatherford Papers.

Nevertheless, the book was reviewed favorably in a number of newspapers and periodicals at the time. As stated earlier, Benjamin Mays lauded it. Yet in truth, Weatherford had solicited this review from him to be published in the *Christian Century* and also to be used in a number of African American newspapers, the latter being the case because Weatherford recognized Mays's "name . . . carr[ied] weight."¹⁶⁸ Mays agreed and in subsequent correspondence noted to Weatherford, "The book will do a lot of good and it should be widely read."¹⁶⁹ Another African American scholar and personal friend, W. J. Faulkner from Fisk, also wrote an affirmative review of it for the *Chicago Defender*.¹⁷⁰ Several white liberals commented positively on *American Churches and the Negro* as well, among them UNC playwright Paul Green, UNC sociologist Guy B. Johnson, and Wake Forest University Christian ethics professor, G. McLeod Bryan.¹⁷¹

Yet there was one critical review by H. L. Puxley, a Canadian minister, writing in the *International Review of Missions*. In particular Puxley questioned Weatherford's assertion that antebellum white church people "were more Christian than present-day churchmen in their attitudes toward the Negroes."¹⁷² Puxley thought Weatherford was so clearly trying to prove this point that Weatherford may have "predetermined" his argument, choosing only the evidence that fit his thesis.¹⁷³ His review was also sharply

¹⁶⁸ W. D. Weatherford to Benjamin Mays, March 11, 1957, Box 1, folder 9, Weatherford collection.

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin E. Mays to W. D. Weatherford, May 16, 1957, Box 1, folder 9, Weatherford collection.

¹⁷⁰ W. J. Faulkner review of *American Churches and the Negro* newspaper clipping, Saturday, August 3, 1957, *Chicago Defender*, folder 3671, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷¹ Paul Green to W. D. Weatherford, March 26, 1957, Box 1, folder 8, Weatherford collection; Guy B. Johnson to W. D. Weatherford, August 13, 1957, Box 1, folder 9, Weatherford collection; and George S. Mitchell to W. D. Weatherford, June 26, 1959, folder 3831, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷² Clipping of H. L. Puxley review of *American Churches and the Negro* in *International Review of Missions*, January 1959, folder 3671, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

critical of Weatherford's last two chapters on the Christian denominations' present programs and Weatherford's "call to action," which he described as "sketchy and disappointing to the extreme."¹⁷⁴ In fact, he called Weatherford's closing chapter "pathetic," particularly because it offered "no specific programme" other than urging whites to recognize African American Christians as their fellow brothers and sisters.¹⁷⁵ For Puxley, in the context of Canada, this was hardly a new concept. Puxley even considered some of Weatherford's practical suggestions to be condescending. He concluded his three page critique by exclaiming, "Can a Boston publishing house honestly mean its dust-cover claim that this book makes 'an important addition to race literature?'"¹⁷⁶ But despite Puxley's insightful remarks, the book was certainly progressive for its time in the South.

Even before it had been published, Weatherford had already decided its topic necessitated wide readership among church members. As a result he determined to get it into the hands of the leaders of "all the denominations in America – 2229 of them."¹⁷⁷ He secured an arrangement with his publisher to sell his book at about half price (dropped from \$3.50 to \$2) if he could front \$4458 to pay the cost for these volumes that were to be sent to church leaders. As in the past Weatherford turned to several philanthropic foundations to fund this project, this time the Harwood Endowment Fund,

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ W. D. Weatherford to Cleveland E. Dodge, December 10, 1956, Box 1, folder 7, Weatherford collection.

Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation, and the Phelps-Stokes Foundation.¹⁷⁸ The last group, headed by Frederick D. Patterson, helped Weatherford to make his plan a reality.

Weatherford also tried to get *American Churches and the Negro* into the hands of college students to be used in study groups. In November 1958 he wrote Patterson of the Phelps-Stokes Foundation about an idea he had.¹⁷⁹ Before revealing his scheme, Weatherford discussed the impact of his *Negro Life in the South* and the study sessions that had developed out of it in the early 1910s. Declaring that “Almost every leader of racial advance in the South comes out of that study class of the earlier years,” Weatherford insisted “we desperately need to do something like that again.”¹⁸⁰ This time he wanted to make his book, as well as James McBride Dabbs’s *The Southern Heritage* (1958), the focus of such attention.¹⁸¹ Dabbs was a white southerner born in 1895, a South Carolina plantation owner with deep familial connections to the Old South.¹⁸² He was also an English professor and a man of substantive Christian faith. Like Weatherford he was a southern liberal, in some ways more progressive than Weatherford, having been involved in the Southern Regional Council and serving as president in 1957 and also being a member of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. In Martin Luther King’s 1963 “Letter from a Birmingham City Jail,” King had included Dabbs in a short list of

¹⁷⁸ See Weatherford to Harwood, December 12, 1956, Box 1, folder 8, Weatherford collection; Weatherford to Dodge, December 10, 1956, Box 1, folder 7, Weatherford collection; and Weatherford to Mays, March 11, 1957, Box 1, folder 9, Weatherford collection.

¹⁷⁹ W. D. Weatherford to F. D. Patterson, November 28, 1958, folder 3437, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ See James McBride Dabbs, *The Southern Heritage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958). For correspondence between Weatherford and Dabbs see W. D. Weatherford to James McBride Dabbs, January 8, 1959, folder 3828, Weatherford Papers; James McBride Dabbs to W. D. Weatherford, January 10, 1959, folder 3828, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to James McBride Dabbs, March 3, 1959, folder 3828, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸² For information on Dabbs see Egerton, *Speak Now*, 551–552; Clayton and Salmond, *Debating Southern History*, 63–64.

white southerners who “had grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it.”¹⁸³ Dabbs’s book made an even stronger call to completely do away with segregation than was found in Weatherford’s work. Dabbs wrote to white southerners insisting that Jim Crow was not necessary to their way of life, and that they should not overreact to the political and social changes being made. Weatherford approved of Dabbs’s views, and Weatherford’s idea was to bind their works together so they could be bought inexpensively and studied at the same time. As Weatherford noted to Patterson of the Phelps-Stokes Foundation, “mine would give the background that looks towards the future; his would give the present situation with implications of the past,” adding further, “The two would make a wonderful combination.”¹⁸⁴ Weatherford hoped such a program might reach as many as twenty thousand college students.

Weatherford’s plan also included getting someone in the field to organize these study sessions in the colleges. As he noted, he wanted to secure a “first class worker who could command respect in the colleges and universities” and speak in these institutions.¹⁸⁵ Patterson was receptive to Weatherford’s idea, and Weatherford went ahead to pursue George S. Mitchell.¹⁸⁶ Mitchell was an economist and a southern liberal; he was also the son of Weatherford’s old friend and Blue Ridge teacher, Samuel Chiles

¹⁸³ See Martin Luther King, Jr, “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” full text online at <http://abacus.bates.edu/admin/offices/dos/mlk/letter.html>. Accessed November 3, 2010. It is unclear how King would have viewed Weatherford, specifically whether or not he would have classified him as one of the “white moderate[s]” of this time. In many ways, though, Weatherford fit the mold of the gradualist that King criticized.

¹⁸⁴ Weatherford to Patterson, November 28, 1958, folder 3437, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Frederick D. Patterson to W. D. Weatherford, December 31, 1958, folder 3437, Weatherford Papers; Mitchell to Weatherford, June 9, 1959, folder 3831; and W. D. Weatherford to George S. Mitchell, June 26, 1959, folder 3831, Weatherford Papers.

Mitchell.¹⁸⁷ However, the younger Mitchell declined to participate largely because he was in retirement, living in Scotland at the time. Weatherford's overall scheme for using his and Dabbs's books also apparently did not materialize. Nevertheless, Weatherford's efforts along these lines shows that he was pursuing the same type of approach he had been using since 1910 with the study groups on *Negro Life in the South*. While his method still remained progressive, it was an outmoded strategy by 1959. At late as 1965 he would still be pushing his book—this time toward white churches—as a helpful guide to the dilemmas they faced as a result of civil rights.¹⁸⁸

Weatherford also promoted another of his old standby strategies in the 1960s to help resolve racial problems. In 1963 he aided in organizing a YMCA interracial gathering of 200 college students in Miami, Florida.¹⁸⁹ Roughly a quarter of these students were African American, and according to Weatherford and one student participant, it proved to be a “significant” event.¹⁹⁰ Weatherford worked to raise money for a follow-up conference in 1964, one that would hopefully bring together 400 students for a 5-day meeting to “study . . . the problems that face students, with extra emphasis on the imperative urgency of our achieving racial equality and good will.”¹⁹¹ Not surprisingly, Weatherford viewed this approach as “the most constructive way to meet this [racial] situation in the South.”¹⁹² Overall, these interracial conferences and the

¹⁸⁷ For the younger Mitchell see Egerton, *Speak Now*, 129 and 133.

¹⁸⁸ W. D. Weatherford to The Christopher Publishing House, January 29, 1965, folder 3878, Weatherford Papers. In this letter he appealed to the publishers to reprint his book, insisting that perhaps they put a statement on the book's cover that said “WHAT HAS CIVIL RIGHTS DONE TO YOUR CHURCH? This book will help you decide what you should do.”

¹⁸⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Grayson Kirk, March 14, 1964, folder 3873, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Richard L. Stevens memorandum, April 10, 1964, folder 3873, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹¹ W. D. Weatherford to Flora M. Rhind (Rockefeller Foundation secretary), March 7, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

As late as 1965 Weatherford continued to concern himself with school desegregation, this time in the broader sense of the entire southern region. Writing to Paul Anthony of the Southern Regional Council that year Weatherford commented,

I am thoroughly and absolutely in accord with the demands of the courts with reference to desegregation but I have dealt with these problems long enough to know you cannot change a whole society, particularly when it pertains to their biases and prejudices. You cannot do it even in a year so I hope we won't be too impatient with the people in their local communities for we have all sorts of people to deal with. I have deep sympathy for the school superintendent who is dealing with this problem of desegregation. Of course we know that is right and the people would be wise to live up to what the Government demands but it is mighty hard for some of them to see it. So, my counsel is to summon as much patience as we can and deal constructively with the non-conformists.¹⁹⁵

Here Weatherford clearly indicated his support for school integration, yet he also evidenced his continuing gradualism. Moreover, he in essence showed he was more sympathetic to the whites dealing with the changes than blacks who were pushing for their rights.

Weatherford's approach to confronting racial inequality begs the question of how he would have viewed Martin Luther King Jr.'s activism in these years. While the historical record does not leave any of his direct comments regarding King, it can fairly be surmised that Weatherford would not have found his methods the most satisfactory.¹⁹⁶ The civil disobedience program of King—and others to the left of him—was never one

¹⁹⁵ W. D. Weatherford to Paul Anthony, November 5, 1965, folder 3669a, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁶ From March 21–25, 1965 Martin Luther King Jr. and approximately 25,000 others participated in a march to Montgomery, Alabama. A few Berea College students took part in this event, and Weatherford's personal secretary from there at the time made the following inquiry of Weatherford: "What do you think of the situation and will King's encouraging people not to buy Alabama-made products effect the ACIPCO? Knowing the negro as you do, and knowing the Alabama people, do you think this procedure of marching and demonstrating is good or bad?" Weatherford's response—if he made one—does not remain, but it is likely he would not have whole-heartedly approved. See Elizabeth Wyckoff to W. D. Weatherford, March 29, 1965, folder 3571, Weatherford Papers; and David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940s to the Present* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 164–167.

projected study groups connected to his and Dabbs's books would be the closest thing to a program Weatherford ever developed in the 1950s and 1960s to improve the South's racial problems.

Through the 1960s Weatherford also pursued other means of helping the South come to terms with the civil rights movement. His most concrete effort came along the lines of pushing the integration of Western North Carolina schools. In these years Weatherford was a member of the Asheville Area Council on Human Relations, a local offshoot of the Southern Regional Council. In 1962 schools in this region of the state still remained segregated, leading to poor educational opportunities for the small minority of African American students there (6 percent of population of these counties).¹⁹³

Because of the separate black and white school systems in these counties, many black students attended one-teacher schools or were forced to travel over 100 miles each day for class. If black students could go to the local white schools it would be much more convenient for them and would also be less expensive than dual schools systems.

Weatherford favored desegregating these white schools, considering this step to be very logical and reasonable, even meeting with North Carolina's Governor Terry Sanford at the time on this subject.¹⁹⁴ Weatherford's participation in such an organization as the Asheville Area Council on Human Relations to implement desegregation shows he still remained a pragmatic gradualist. He was working in one area to address an overwhelmingly logical concern.

¹⁹³ William Bagwell, "The Pitiful State of Negro Education in Western North Carolina," February 20, 1962, folder 3855, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹⁴ William Bagwell to George Abbott, January 4, 1962, folder 3855, Weatherford Papers; William Bagwell to W. D. Weatherford, April 13, 1962, folder 3855, Weatherford Papers; George A. Abbott memorandum to "Council Member," May 1, 1962, folder 3855, Weatherford Papers.

with which Weatherford felt comfortable. He had spent his whole life—remember he was 79 years old at the time of the *Brown* decision—pursuing a gradualist plan that was careful not to provoke backlash from southern whites. Changing by this point for him was difficult, if even possible. Nevertheless, while he may not have approved of these methods, it appears Weatherford did respect King. Following King’s winning of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, a dinner in Atlanta was held in his honor, to which two of Weatherford’s friends attended. Writing Weatherford soon after this event, Rachel Schilling noted, “I’m sure you would have enjoyed being there,” implying that he must have viewed King positively.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, Weatherford and King also shared a common theological basis in Personalism.¹⁹⁸ King had completed his doctorate at Boston University under the influence of this school of thought. Indeed, the language King used in his “Letter from a Birmingham City Jail” about the sacredness of personality was nearly identical to the words Weatherford often employed. Specifically in King’s letter he discussed his hope that the South would one day be a place “where all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.”¹⁹⁹ Overall the major difference between King and Weatherford was not in their goals for racial equality but in their strategies and pace for change.

Weatherford’s last public comment on race came in a *Charlotte Observer* article published on December 2, 1966. Celebrating his 91st birthday at Emory University in Atlanta, Weatherford observed to a reporter that “Significant progress has been made in

¹⁹⁷ Rachel and Herman Schilling to W. D. Weatherford, February 7, 1965, folder 3886, Weatherford Papers. Also included in this letter was the program from the dinner. See also King’s letter in Salmond and Clayton, *Debating Southern History*, 96.

¹⁹⁸ This issue remains a debated point among historians. The extent to which Personalism impacted King’s thought and activism has been called into question by historian David L. Chappell. See David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London, 2004), 52–54.

¹⁹⁹ See King’s letter in Salmond and Clayton, *Debating Southern History*, 96.

race relations in recent years.”²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, Weatherford also went on to note, ““But we’re going to have to go a lot further.””²⁰¹ Thus even after the federal legislative gains of 1964 and 1965, he still saw that work needed to be done.

In many ways Benjamin Mays was right that age had not made Weatherford more conservative on race. After the 1950s Weatherford simply looked less liberal in comparison to where the leading figures involved in civil rights then stood.

Weatherford’s outlook on race had clearly broadened throughout his life, even in the years after 1930. In 1932 he had been for a segregated order of society, yet beginning in 1943 he began to consider a world in which this was not the case. By the late 1940s he recognized that if the churches wanted to maintain their place and credibility in society, they must combat segregation in their congregations. After the *Brown* decision Weatherford put his support behind school desegregation and the overall goals of the civil rights movement. His method for ending Jim Crow always remained gradualist, particularly focusing on the use of books, educational programs, and conferences. After leaving Fisk in 1946, *American Churches and the Negro* would be Weatherford’s most visible contribution to race relations.

One place where Weatherford can fairly be criticized about his race relations work is the way in which he viewed his achievements. Weatherford was content with how he had always approached the subject. Indeed he never, in all of his writings, looked back and criticized himself on how he had handled racial issues. It does not appear that Weatherford ever considered that he should have done things differently. Moreover, he

²⁰⁰ “Weatherford Hails Appalachia Efforts,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 2, 1966, newspaper clipping in folder 3747, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

viewed positively the previous generation's race relations efforts (of which he had been a leader), focusing on the progress that had been made rather than emphasizing the places where liberals like himself could have pushed things further. He believed that the programs and approaches he had always used had been successful. Throughout his entire adult life Weatherford placed his faith in the power of education to bring change. For him, if white Americans were just better informed and educated about the past, as well as the current conditions of African Americans, then this new understanding would result in the end to racial problems. He did not see the need for something more radical to be done, nor did he ever endorse and place his support behind nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience. As a liberal but never an activist, his views differed markedly from how the vast majority of African Americans at the time saw things and responded to these issues.

Chapter 6—Bringing a Revival to the Mountains: Weatherford's Commitment to Berea College and Appalachian Reform, 1946–1970

In 1953 W. D. Weatherford wrote famed playwright Paul Green of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill about plans for an outdoor drama—ultimately entitled *Wilderness Road*—to be held at Berea College in Kentucky.¹ This institution was known at the time for its unique blend of work and learning, its mission to Appalachian residents, and its tuition-free policy.² Berea was soon to celebrate its centennial, and Weatherford had been leading an effort to have a play written and performed, highlighting and bringing national attention to the college's educational program and history. In light of Weatherford's long involvement in race relations, however, it initially might seem surprising to read the following instructions he passed on to Green. He wrote,

I am sure you should be free to use the dramatic incidents in the life of John G. Fee, our founder, and others; but I am equally sure we do not want a Race Drama. This is not Berea's chief concern. Our real concern is the Appalachian Mountain boys and girls. The race issue is just one illustration of our sense of the dignity of all persons. To that doctrine, and to do something about it, we are unalterably dedicated.³

The “dignity of all persons”—Weatherford's basic religious conception—grew from his belief in Personalism. Throughout Weatherford's life this theological grounding guided

¹ For Paul Green see John Herbert Roper, *Paul Green: Playwright of the Real South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); and Charles S. Watson, *The History of Southern Drama* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 99–121.

² “Berea Will Mark Centennial Year,” June 19, 1955, *New York Times*.

³ W. D. Weatherford to Paul Green, May 14, 1953, Record Group No. 9, Box 1, folder 8, W. D. Weatherford collection, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky. Emphasis in original. It appears Weatherford chose not to pursue a “Race Drama” largely because he was interested in what a play highlighting white Appalachians could do to bring support for the school and the region. While African American concerns remained secondary Weatherford still had these on his mind. In 1964 he corresponded with Green about the possibility of “writing a great Negro Drama—which would dramatize the 300 years of Negro struggle for his place in America.” While it never materialized, Green apparently supported this project. See unpaginated notebook titled “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

his social work, and after 1946 he would, while applying this philosophy, direct most of his activities to the concerns of Appalachia.

Despite Weatherford's instructions to Green, racial concerns had actually been a vital part of the Berea heritage. From the school's founding through 1904 it had included male and female African American and white students, there being as many or more black students as white prior to 1893.⁴ Indeed, for nearly its first half-century of existence, interracial education was central to Berea's mission, making the college a very unusual place in this period of southern history. The college's motto, "God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth," also spoke to its founding principles. Yet in 1904, during the "nadir" of southern race relations, the Kentucky legislature passed the Day Law making it illegal to educate white and black students together. Berea, after losing its appeal to overturn this act, stopped admitting African Americans.⁵ In the coming years, the university turned instead to a commitment to the young white men and women of the Appalachian region, intensifying a trend already underway since the early 1890s by its president, William Goodell Frost.⁶ By the time Weatherford wrote Green in 1953 Berea, was just beginning to reintegrate, having started this process in 1950.⁷ Nevertheless, the college's well-established mission to mountain students at that point had become its primary concern, with integration there moving slowly in the coming years. Weatherford's suggestion to Green only further illuminates how Berea's chief constituency at this point still overwhelming remained white Appalachian students.

⁴ Shannon H. Wilson, *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 77–81.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

The college's shift in emphasis in the early 1900s parallels a similar one that took place in Weatherford's own life in the 1940s. Just as a concern for the Appalachian region came to overshadow Berea's commitment to African Americans, the same was true for Weatherford after 1946. Leaving Fisk University in that year, Weatherford put the greatest part of his energies into serving Berea and white Appalachia's needs. Yet, as his 1953 letter to Green reveals, what connected Weatherford to this new interest was his religious belief in "the dignity of all persons"—the very idea that had impressed upon him the need to do something for African Americans in 1908. Overall, Weatherford's Christian convictions made him feel a responsibility to address Appalachia, and just as these beliefs—along with his Victorian values and faith in the power of education—had kept his race-related work and achievements within certain boundaries, the same proved to be the case in this field as well.

Indeed, there were many similarities between Weatherford's Appalachian work and his previous efforts in race relations. Like his activities for blacks in the early 1900s, Weatherford saw Appalachian people as a minority group too, ones who were underprivileged and exploited and who needed better opportunities. However, just as it was difficult for him to recognize that African American social justice could not be obtained without ending the structures of racism, it too remained hard for him to see that addressing Appalachia's larger economic issues had to be tackled before the region's poverty and social problems could be more fully resolved. Weatherford's strategies for both groups also closely resembled one another with his plans always heavily relying on the dissemination of information about these respective constituencies to the wider public. Once this data was known, he assumed, change would follow.

In Appalachia, Weatherford believed the combined forces of education and religion could bring a revolution. In his view, the church—both within and outside the region—had a special role to play in improving this area. In particular, Weatherford wanted to revitalize mountain churches, making them more vibrant, efficient, and “respectable”—a vision comparable to his earlier efforts for “religion” when he worked for the collegiate YMCA. Weatherford also trusted that education would help to uplift these residents from their current plight. Overall, he hoped that he could aid in bringing a renewed sense of worth to these people, and as a liberal in the classical sense, he was optimistic progress could be made.

Weatherford’s interest in bringing pride to white Appalachians, however, represents a slightly different focus than he had with southern blacks in earlier times. In fact, Weatherford’s race-related activities and books were seldom (particularly in the years before 1934) directed toward African Americans and improving their self-esteem. Instead, he mainly intended to first change southern whites’ opinions and assumptions about blacks and their culture. Weatherford’s advocacy for southern mountaineers, though, would be targeted at both those within and outside the region.

Yet Weatherford’s clear devotion and sincere concern for this region and its people were mixed with a certain paternalistic attitude as well. Writing from his home, Far Horizons, in 1964 to Wilma Dykeman, Weatherford revealed the following thoughts and images,

As I write this morning (Feb. 19, 1964) I look out from my mountain top through a picture window on a world glistening white with snow. Every mountain, every tree, every shrub speaks of beauty. But I cannot help seeing in my imagination thousands of little families of children huddled around small fires in dingy rooms all through these mountains-and I know they can hardly see the glory of the world

through their darkened windows. When will the school and the church, and all the host of us who have had better opportunities wake up to the crying need of these boys and girls in the mountains- and do something to bring to them inspiration and the light of life. Or will this whole generation of boys and girls have to grow up in ignorance, poverty. . . .⁸

Weatherford, nearly ninety years old by then, understood this region's challenges and believed he and other privileged individuals had a responsibility here. In 1946 at age seventy, when most people retired, Weatherford dedicated his time and energy to Appalachia. In that year he became assistant to Berea's College president, Francis S. Hutchins, initially serving primarily in fundraising and student recruitment. Over the next twenty years Weatherford's involvement in this school and in the region grew and expanded. Indeed by 1960, one supporter of Weatherford's was referring to him as "the Albert Schweitzer of the mountains."⁹ Weatherford's efforts in this section of the country would culminate in his leadership of a major scholarly survey of Appalachia (published 1962) and his attempts to implement development programs as the region received national attention during the presidential administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

In spite of his intense focus in the years after 1946, Weatherford and Appalachia had long been connected. In fact, Weatherford's parents were both natives of the southern highlands, a point he increasingly emphasized as he worked in this region and tried to connect himself with its people. Late in life he recalled the childhood stories his

⁸ See "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers.

⁹ W. D. Weatherford to Elizabeth Wyckoff, November 25, 1960, folder 3553, Weatherford Papers. Humbly Weatherford responded, "But I will trade for just an efficient advocate of the mountains." Schweitzer was a theologian and physician born in Alsace in 1875 (same year as Weatherford). Known for his study of the "historical Jesus," he worked the greater part of his life as a medical missionary in Gabon, Africa. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001 [1906]), vii-ix.

mother told him of her youth there and how these tales influenced his own interest.¹⁰

During his collegiate years at Vanderbilt he studied Appalachian literature under William Baskervill and “occasionally took excursions” into the mountains.¹¹ In the midst of completing his dissertation, and while working for the YMCA, Weatherford and his first wife spent the summer of 1904 vacationing in western North Carolina, getting to know the residents on the North Fork of the Swannanoa River.¹² Weatherford was fascinated by his experience with these people and developed a certain attraction to the area. Indeed, his trip there played a significant part in his decision to build the South’s YMCA conference center in Black Mountain, NC, just a few years later. In 1914, the third summer that the Blue Ridge facility operated, Berea’s president William Goodell Frost spent a week there, apparently finding Weatherford’s setup rather appealing. According to Weatherford’s reports, Frost insisted, “You are doing the same thing we are at Berea, namely combining work and study. But it seems to me you are even getting more out of it than we are. You must come on the Berea Board.”¹³ So Weatherford soon joined the college’s board of trustees, remaining continuously through 1963.¹⁴

Weatherford’s involvement with Berea prior to 1946 would remain steady but never intense. In 1919 Frost, who was retiring and helping to find his own successor, recommended Weatherford for the presidency.¹⁵ Yet Weatherford declined because he was committed to the YMCA at this time and its southern training school in Nashville.

¹⁰ See “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers.

¹¹ See unpaginated notebook, W. D. Weatherford, “Growing Up in Weatherford, Texas,” Weatherford family papers, Far Horizons, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

¹² Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 52–56.

¹³ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers.

¹⁴ See “Berea College Progress Report,” June 1963, folder 3499, Weatherford Papers; and Loyal Jones, “The Surveys of the Appalachian Region,” *Appalachian Heritage* 4 (Spring 1976), 37.

¹⁵ Wilson, *Berea College*, 116.

Still, Berea's religious, moral, and labor style continued to greatly appeal to Weatherford in the coming years. In 1939, as he gave a welcoming speech at the induction of Berea's new president, Francis S. Hutchins, Weatherford laid out his concern for the state of moral and religious instruction in U. S. colleges and universities. Speaking candidly he said, "American education is making a determined effort to produce a generation of religious morons – and I must say I believe is succeeding well."¹⁶ At Berea he noted, however, "We believe profoundly that education without moral and religious instruction is a misnomer."¹⁷ Since 1930 Weatherford had been increasing his stake in Berea, becoming chair of the trustee board in that year and of its educational policy committee in 1935.¹⁸ As his retirement age came near in the early 1940s Weatherford felt that he owed Berea his undivided attention.

Weatherford's initial role at the college was largely in fundraising.¹⁹ In these years he teamed up with Bruce Barton, a fellow Berea trustee and a famous advertising figure of this generation, to gather support for the college.²⁰ Barton made a name for himself at the school during the William J. Hutchins administration (1920–1938) by writing a letter to twenty-four businessmen that apparently was 100 percent successful.²¹ In this letter Barton played up the "pure blooded English" background of Berea's clientele and the possibilities for achievement of this "raw material," in "contrast to the

¹⁶ W. D. Weatherford, untitled speech, 1939, folder 2688, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ W. D. Weatherford to Thomas E. Jones, January 10, 194[6], folder 3312, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁹ Francis S. Hutchins to W. D. Weatherford, February 19, 1944, folder 3365, Weatherford Papers; and Charles Ward Seabury, April 10, 1945, folder 3366, Weatherford Papers.

²⁰ See Bruce Barton to William A. McRitchie, October 19, 1955, folder 3409, Weatherford Papers; and "Bruce Barton, Ad Man, Is Dead; Author, Former Representative," *New York Times*, July 6, 1967. Barton was also famous for his rendering of Jesus of Nazareth's story in *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925) which highlighted Jesus's business skills and masculinity. For more on Barton see Richard M. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).

²¹ See "Bruce Barton's Pet Enthusiasm," folder 3458, Weatherford Papers.

imported stuff.”²² In matters of fundraising Barton would refer to Weatherford as “a sort of combination of John the Baptist and Joan of Arc” because of his crusading efforts and zeal for Berea.²³ Weatherford, while not using xenophobic arguments on the college’s behalf, nevertheless always remained nostalgic about Berea’s mountain students and their backgrounds. Writing to a possible donor in 1950, Weatherford described the institution in the following terms:

Berea College was established almost one hundred years ago to help educate the boys and girls of the Appalachian Mountains. We choose 90% of our students from these mountains. These boys and girls are largely of Scotch ancestry, and are a hardy, upstanding group. All they need is education to make them a real asset to America.²⁴

Weatherford had a tendency to idealize these people and went on to do so in a book he published as part of Berea’s 100-year anniversary in 1955. In *Pioneers of Destiny: The Romance of the Appalachian People*, Weatherford gave a popular history of the Scots-Irish who settled this region.²⁵ For the most part, Weatherford accepted what Appalachian historian Richard B. Drake has called the “Celtic Thesis,” a view that Appalachia was peopled primarily by Scots-Irish and other English “backcountry” immigrants who by bringing their distinct ways of living there, defined the region’s culture from that time forward.²⁶ By showing what Weatherford considered to be these people’s exceptional characteristics, *Pioneers of Destiny* illustrated the constituency Berea served. By this time, Weatherford seemed to have forgotten the college’s early mission to African Americans.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Barton to McRitchie, October 19, 1955, folder 3409, Weatherford Papers.

²⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Katharine H. Baker, November 16, 1950, folder 3371, Weatherford Papers.

²⁵ See W. D. Weatherford, *Pioneers of Destiny: The Romance of the Appalachian People* (Birmingham: Vulcan Press, Inc., 1955).

²⁶ Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 20–21.

Nevertheless, Weatherford remained an excellent fundraiser and “salesman” for Berea. One of the ways he accomplished this feat was by emphasizing his own personal connection to Appalachia in his correspondence, speeches, and books on the college and the region after 1946. Again and again he would note “I’m a mountaineer,” playing up his link to this section of the country because of his parents’ birth there and his own experiences in the mountains while administering Blue Ridge.²⁷ For him, these “mountaineers” were his people, and this fact increased his investment in their lives and the region. Just as he had stressed his southern background in earlier years when trying to draw attention to race and gain credibility among white southerners, now he reached out to gain support for Appalachian reform by touting his connection to the region. Weatherford’s romanticism for the mountain people of the nineteenth century also paralleled a similar view he had held of the Old South in earlier years.

Yet the Appalachian region that Weatherford encountered in the late 1940s was anything but idyllic. While the Second World War had helped to stimulate its economy briefly, this boom period did not last long. In these years the region faced a major outmigration of many of its residents, some leaving for military service during the war and others moving to northern and midwestern cities for better job opportunities.²⁸ Indeed between 1940 and 1970 roughly 3 million people left Appalachia. Two major

²⁷ See “Talk by Dr. Willis Duke Weatherford (age 85) to Catholic Bishop Waters (and others) of the Raleigh, NC Diocese and Glenmary Missionary Order,” circa 1961–1962, sound recording, SC or 500-001-A, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College; and “Statement mailed to Wilma D., Nov. 17, 1966,” folder 3761, Weatherford Papers.

²⁸ Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 13–15. For more on the Appalachia see Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); John C. Inscoe, “The Discovery of Appalachia: Regional Revisionism as Scholarly Renaissance,” in John B. Boles, ed., *A Companion to the American South* (Malden, Mass., and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 369–386; and Drake, *History of Appalachia*.

causes for this shift in population were the new, more advanced mining technologies and a lowered demand for coal. Over this time mechanization in the extractive industries increasingly displaced laborers, and with less need for coal after the war, the mining workforce experienced even greater cuts.²⁹ According to Appalachian historian Ronald D. Eller, of the nearly 500,000 miners in 1945, less than half remained in 1960, and by 1970 this group had declined to 107,000. In the process these industries left their mark on the environment, as unregulated mining techniques and activities “disfigured” mountains and polluted the region’s streams and waterways.³⁰ These economic and ecological factors clearly pushed many residents from the mountains, but the possibility of better lives outside the region also pulled them as well.

Yet for numerous emigrants the transition to these new places did not prove easy. Like southern African Americans who headed north during the Great Migration of the 1910s and afterwards, mountaineers who journeyed to cities often struggled to adjust to the new ways of urban life, meeting discrimination from the established residents.³¹ Mountain culture was typically at odds with the societies of these new places, and Appalachians migrants were at times derisively labeled “SAMs (southern Appalachian mountaineers), hillbillies, snakes, briar hoppers, and ridge runners.”³²

Those who remained at home clearly languished. Not only were mountain residents hurt by the changes occurring in the mining industries, but those who made their living through agriculture also suffered. Here also mechanization, along with

²⁹ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 16–20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23–25. For Great Migration see Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

³² Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 25.

increased costs of fertilizers and pesticides, made it more difficult for the same level of farmers to completely support themselves in this way of life.³³ Over the course of 1950s, half of the farmers in the region went on to seek other employment, with only roughly 6 percent of mountaineers holding full-time work in agriculture by 1970.³⁴ Sadly, as Eller notes, “unemployment, poverty, and welfare dependence became a way of life in communities throughout the region.”³⁵ By 1960 one of three Appalachian families lived below the poverty line, in contrast to one in five nationally.³⁶ All of these problems led to a growing attention on the region in the 1950s and 1960s.

Even so, this section of the country had been a site of interest in the American imagination since the late nineteenth century. Beginning in the years after the Civil War, Protestant missionaries, “popular writers of the Local Color School,” and business advocates illuminated the region through their works, allowing the rest of America to “discover” it.³⁷ Reformers like Berea’s president Frost fit among the first of these groups, devoted to “saving” Appalachia through education and religious instruction.

Other missionaries to this region in the coming years pursued similar goals of reform but also studied and provided information about it. Perhaps the most notable of these figures was John C. Campbell. Growing up in Wisconsin, Campbell received seminary training at Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts between 1892 and 1895, and in this time became interested in the “Southern Highlands.”³⁸ After

³³ Roy E. Proctor and T. Kelley White, “Agriculture: A Reassessment,” in Thomas R. Ford, ed., *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1962), 87.

³⁴ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁷ Drake, *History of Appalachia*, 121.

³⁸ See John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1921 [1969]), vii; and Jones, “Surveys of the Appalachian Region,” 26.

educational service in Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia, Campbell and his second wife, Olive Dame, led a major study of southern Appalachia. Financed by the Russell Sage Foundation of New York, the couple began their travels in 1908 for what became a three-year study.³⁹ After the final report was finished, Campbell expanded his interest to “encourag[e] new work and coordination and improvement of all efforts.”⁴⁰ One of the products of Campbell’s efforts was the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers in 1913 (later renamed Council of the Southern Mountains), which would become the major reform organization for this region in the coming years. Campbell died in 1919 while preparing his published study, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, and his wife Olive Dame Campbell in 1921 subsequently finished the project. In 1925 the Council of Southern Mountains became stationed at Berea.⁴¹

Following the Campbells’ book the region received sporadic attention through the 1950s. In 1935 the U. S. Department of Agriculture undertook an updated study that was published as *Economic and Social Problems and Conditions of the Southern Appalachians*.⁴² In the 1950s the Council of the Southern Mountains under the new leadership of Perley F. Ayer brought renewed vigor to its work, supporting workshops for educators and social workers, and pushing states for greater involvement in the interests of mountain concerns.⁴³ Many Appalachian reformers began to see that federal intervention and directed coordination would be necessary for solving the section’s problems. It was within this milieu that Weatherford operated as he served Berea in the

³⁹ Jones, “Surveys of the Appalachian Region,” 27–29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴¹ Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals*, 20.

⁴² See Jones, “Surveys of the Appalachian Region,” 26 and 35–36.

⁴³ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 41.

years after 1946, and his activities increasingly expanded beyond the college's interests into the broader region.

Indeed it was in connection to Weatherford's sponsorship of *Wilderness Road* in 1955 that he was catapulted into his greatest advocacy work for Appalachia. Since the early 1950s Weatherford had been planning this event, considering it a large investment that would bring rewards to the college in the form of publicity, financial support, and respectability for mountain people.⁴⁴ In fact, when Weatherford secured Paul Green to write the play, Weatherford had already planned out all elements of the project, something that Green had never experienced before when approached for such work.⁴⁵ Over the coming years Green would develop a close friendship with and respect for Weatherford.⁴⁶ When the book form of the play was published, he would dedicate it to Weatherford.⁴⁷

Yet the drama that Weatherford originally envisioned did not materialize in the way he planned. Initially Weatherford wanted a "pioneer drama"—one that emphasized the "heroic" traits of these white mountaineers in the period leading up to Kentucky's statehood in 1792.⁴⁸ However, President Hutchins later rejected this plan because he felt

⁴⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Francis S. Hutchins, June 26, 1953, folder 3397, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Francis S. Hutchins, January 19, 1954, folder 3404, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Mrs. Stanley R. McCormick, November 23, 1954, folder 3406, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁵ Laurence G. Avery, ed., *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green, 1916–1981* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 527.

⁴⁶ In 1961 Green was unable to attend Weatherford's 86th birthday party but wrote its organizer with regrets noting, "Please convey to him sincere regrets and my heart-full of admiration and love for him as always. He is a wonderful man and I can always draw a bead on some of his values when I consider how much poorer the world would be if he had not been." Paul Green to James W. Sells, November 28, 1961, folder 3848, Weatherford Papers. For another letter attesting to Green's respect for Weatherford see Paul Green to W. D. Weatherford, October 31, 1962, folder 3857, Weatherford Papers.

⁴⁷ See Paul Green, *Wilderness Road: A Symphonic Outdoor Drama* (New York and other cities: Samuel French, Inc., 1956), [iii].

⁴⁸ See Avery, ed., *A Southern Life*, 544; Paul Green to Ted Cronk, November 26, 1954, folder 3403, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to James Cannon, October 25, 1954, folder 3402, Weatherford

it was too far removed from Berea's actual story.⁴⁹ Several women faculty members also objected to Weatherford's idea, one pointing out that Weatherford's version was too narrow.⁵⁰ Julia F. Allen, from Berea's Office of the Dean of Women, commented "The Scotch-Irish heritage, the folk music, the folk arts and crafts, the early patterns of rural isolated living are all important; but the mining camping and textile mills, the T.V.A., the heterogeneous racial groups in the area—including the Indians and the Negroes, are important, too."⁵¹ Weatherford was not so interested in such complexity but rather wanted to primarily highlight and bring respect to the region's white mountaineers and their supposed perseverance. The play that was finally produced focused on the period of Berea's early history.

Wilderness Road was set in the Civil War era, 1858–1863.⁵² It began as the main character, John Freeman (a white man), returns to his small Kentucky hometown after going to college in Ohio—presumably Oberlin—and tries with mixed results to run a school there. Freeman knows John G. Fee of Berea and receives support from him in the form of books and visits to his fledgling academy. Yet in the midst of debates over slavery and free speech, Freeman's school is forced to close. As the war comes, the town becomes divided between northern and southern allegiances. One of Freeman's students, Neill Sims, fights for the North because of his belief in the righteousness of their cause and rebukes Freeman for his pacifism. Yet after Neill gets hurt, Freeman ends up taking

Papers. Indeed Green went ahead and drafted this version of the play until Berea's President Hutchins vetoed this plan.

⁴⁹ Francis S. Hutchins to W. D. Weatherford, December 4, 1954, folder 3404, Weatherford Papers; and Francis S. Hutchins to Paul Green, December 4, 1954, folder 3404, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁰ Julia F. Allen to Francis S. Hutchins, May 28, 1952, folder 3382, Weatherford Papers; and Elizabeth S. Peck to Francis S. Hutchins, December 5, 1954, folder 3404, Weatherford Papers.

⁵¹ Allen to Hutchins, May 28, 1952, folder 3382, Weatherford Papers.

⁵² See Green, *Wilderness Road*.

his place with the Union and dies in a battle facing his own brother, Davie. Overall, the story engaged with the importance of education, religion, and freedom of expression, while also providing a view of mountain culture. Despite addressing the issue of slavery, this drama was almost exclusively focused on the perspective of white Kentuckians. As Berea historian Shannon Wilson notes, African Americans—so vital in the early years of Berea’s history—“were largely incidental in the play and were passive participants in their cause for freedom.”⁵³

Nevertheless, *Wilderness Road* was well received at the time, even garnering some national press attention. The New York *Times* reviewed the play’s opening performance, commenting that Green’s drama “boldly challenged the [southern] region tonight to view its race relations problem as part of the total democratic struggle to preserve free inquiry.”⁵⁴ Placing the story in relation to the recent *Brown* decision, the reviewer drew parallels for the current need of southerners like Freeman to speak out against the prevailing conservative reaction. Weatherford wrote Green a few days later also showing his support, noting “I think you have a great play—not my play—but a great play.”⁵⁵ For Weatherford the importance of *Wilderness Road* was to celebrate Berea and draw attention to it, thus his goal had been achieved. The drama would run for three more summers with over 160,000 attending, but after losing a total of \$25,000, the board of trustees stopped its production.⁵⁶ Weatherford was disappointed by this

⁵³ Wilson, *Berea College*, 157.

⁵⁴ “Play Dares South to Face Problems,” June 30, 1955, New York *Times*. For more information on the play and Berea’s centennial activities see “Berea Will Mark Centennial Year,” June 19, 1955, New York *Times*.

⁵⁵ Avery, ed., *A Southern Life*, 553. The particular letter is W. D. Weatherford to Paul Green, July 6, 1955, in Paul Green’s papers at the Southern Historical Collection.

⁵⁶ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 201.

decision, yet he and Green would still be trying to rework and produce the play as late as 1967.⁵⁷

At the time of *Wilderness Road's* debut, Weatherford had larger dreams for how the play might also help with what he considered to be a religious “crisis” in the mountains. Writing to James Cannon, dean of Duke University’s School of Theology in October 1954, he noted that an important part of the drama was “to set forward both education and religion.”⁵⁸ Weatherford went on to describe how the latter was currently at a low ebb, listing the following facts:

First, thirty per cent of all mountain churches have an average of twenty-five or less members, and another twenty-five per cent of the churches have an average of fifty or less members. Second, there are more than fifty denominations and sects in these mountains. Third, sixty per cent of all mountain preachers have only high school or less education, with no theological education. Fourth, the great majority of mountain churches have no Sunday School, no women’s society, no men’s society, no youth organization. Fifth, the average church has one service a month or less. I need not comment on the results.⁵⁹

In Weatherford’s view these statistics constituted a major problem for Christianity in Appalachia.

Ever the planner, Weatherford went on to suggest his idea to remedy this situation. He wanted to enlist Cannon’s cooperation, who was Methodist, and gather other Christian leaders to stage religious gatherings each Sunday during *Wilderness Road's* first summer with the theme, “A Total Gospel for the Mountains.”⁶⁰ Eight different Protestant denominations ended up participating over the course of that period, leading Weatherford to organize an interdenominational gathering the following year at

⁵⁷ Paul Green to W. D. Weatherford, November 3, 1967, Box 1, folder 8, Weatherford Collection.

⁵⁸ Weatherford to Cannon, October 25, 1954, folder 3402, Weatherford Papers.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ The play did not run on these evenings.

Berea to “discuss ways of cooperative action in bettering the religious conditions of the region.”⁶¹ One of the issues Weatherford intended to tackle was helping mountain churches to operate more efficiently. Particularly he hoped that mountain congregations could find ways to share religious facilities, alternating over the course of a certain period, thereby making more effective use of resources. Weatherford’s plans revealed his ecumenical outlook and faith in these religiously united efforts.

The interdenominational assembly met in June 1956 and spawned activities in Appalachia that extended well beyond religious concerns.⁶² Nearly 100 Christian representatives attended, and at the end of the gathering they formed the Religious Workers’ Conference for the Appalachian Mountains.⁶³ However, evidently early in the initial meeting many delegates determined that “adequate, accurate, and comparable data” about the region was needed in order for the group to effectively “plan a real forward movement” with mountain churches.⁶⁴ The last regional survey had been completed in 1935, and conditions had drastically changed because of migration patterns as well as economic developments. Participants in this 1956 gathering decided a new economic, educational, social, and religious study of southern Appalachia was necessary before effective regional religious planning and programs could be undertaken. Thus out of this conference developed a group to carry out a new survey of southern Appalachia.

⁶¹ W. D. Weatherford to William J. Baird, June 5, 1956, folder 3512, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Earl Brewer, January 7, 1956, folder 3512, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Arthur Bannerman, March 21, 1956, folder 3512, Weatherford Papers. Emphasis in original.

⁶² See W. D. Weatherford, “The Southern Appalachian Studies: Their Final Form and Potential,” *Mountain Life and Work* 35 (Winter 1959), 27.

⁶³ W. D. Weatherford to Henry S. Randolph, September 29, 1956, folder 3517, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁴ “Report of Southern Appalachian Studies,” January 1962, folder 3577a, Weatherford Papers.

Officially incorporated as the Southern Appalachian Studies (SAS) in 1958, the organization would be based at Berea and directed by Weatherford.⁶⁵

Of course such a substantial enterprise required money and skillful organization, and Weatherford went to work addressing these needs. Indeed by 1958 Weatherford had gained the backing of the Ford Foundation with a \$250,000 grant, along with an additional \$60,000 in aid from universities and Christian groups.⁶⁶ Weatherford also began securing researchers and enlisting support from churches and state governments in the region, as well as from groups like the Council of the Southern Mountains. Prominent scholars from across Appalachia would conduct the study from 1958 to 1961, and in 1962 *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* was published.⁶⁷

It was an ambitious project. Under the leadership of Weatherford, Earl D. C. Brewer (Emory University professor of sociology and religion), Thomas R. Ford (University of Kentucky professor of sociology), and Rupert V. Vance (UNC professor of sociology) the study was directed along with the aid of eighteen other scholars.⁶⁸ There were several primary objectives. First, these researchers wanted to determine “what changes had taken place” in this section since the last survey in 1935 and evaluate their affect on the region.⁶⁹ Next they wanted to gather data about the current conditions in regard to health, education, religion, and economics. The aim was to establish what Appalachian residents “really needed to bring them up to the American standards of

⁶⁵ Thomas R. Ford, ed., *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1962), [v].

⁶⁶ Weatherford, “The Southern Appalachian Studies,” 27–28; and “Berea Gets \$250,000 to Make Study of Southern Appalachian Mountains,” *The Pinnacle*, January 14, 1958, newspaper clipping in folder 3482, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁷ See “Editorially Speaking,” *The Pinnacle*, March 7, 1961, newspaper clipping in folder 3493, Weatherford Papers.

⁶⁸ Jones, “Surveys of the Appalachian Region,” 37–38.

⁶⁹ Ford, ed., *Southern Appalachian Region*, vi.

living and culture,” with the expectation that the information they collected might “point to some practical solutions of the problems found.”⁷⁰ In the end, these scholars determined the region was a “problem area” for the United States primarily due to economic concerns rather than inherent issues with the people there.⁷¹ As noted Appalachian scholar Loyal Jones described the study, “The SAS saw the main problem as one of a failure of the American economic system to operate fully in the Appalachian region. The solution was assumed to be a method of bringing the fruits of this system to this backwater of American life.”⁷² Like other books Weatherford had helped produce, *The Southern Appalachian Region* did essentially much the same thing—survey an issue, put the information together, and then get the results out to trained people and the public to make changes. Weatherford believed knowledge would lead to action and improvement.

Weatherford himself contributed one chapter on twentieth-century Appalachian literature to this project. Evidently Weatherford assigned himself this task, but as it turns out, his initial draft was not well received by the other leaders of the SAS.⁷³ Thomas R. Ford, who was the editor of the volume, later recalled that Weatherford’s paper, while being “solid,” was “archaic in style.”⁷⁴ Ford and Bruce F. Denbo, one of the editors of the University Press of Kentucky, recommended to Weatherford that he seek a

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Jones, “Surveys of the Appalachian Region,” 38.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷³ See Thomas Ford, “Weatherford Award Speeches,” 1974, sound recording, AC or 169-002, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* University Press of Kentucky editor Bruce F. Denbo also noted “the approach Dr. Weatherford took to this subject would not be the one which would prevent serious criticism from scholars.” Bruce F. Denbo to Thomas R. Ford, May 2, 1960, folder 3546, Weatherford Papers.

collaborator for the chapter, a suggestion to which Weatherford acquiesced.⁷⁵ During this same time it appears Ford was also frustrated by another issue with Weatherford's section, specifically his confusion over Weatherford's apparent goal of "'inspir[ing]' the mountain people" through this chapter.⁷⁶ Ford hints that Weatherford's inclination was to applaud those writers who emphasized the positive traits of Appalachians, while dismissing those who "recorded undesirable characteristics."⁷⁷ Nevertheless these issues seem to have been resolved when Wilma Dykeman co-authored with Weatherford a quick sketch of the region's most notable authors and their depiction of this culture.⁷⁸ The connection between Weatherford and Dykeman would grow over the coming years in their united concern for Appalachia, what the latter would come to refer to in 1964 as "our mutual gospel."⁷⁹

The SAS program was part of a growing national concern for the region taking place in the late 1950s. In these years, amid the cold war with U.S.S.R., "Appalachia was an embarrassment to the nation," a section where capitalism and the market economy had failed.⁸⁰ After the successes of government intervention during the Great Depression and through the Marshall Plan in Europe, many Americans liberals now had immense confidence in the state's power to "alleviate want and mobilize for action."⁸¹ At the same time, work within this section of the country, most notably by the Council of the Southern Mountains, was increasing. In particular this organization put together tours of

⁷⁵ Denbo to Ford, May 2, 1960, folder 3546, Weatherford Papers; and Thomas R. Ford to W. D. Weatherford, May 5, 1960, folder 3546, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁶ Thomas R. Ford to W. D. Weatherford, May 28, 1960, folder 3546, Weatherford Papers.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ See W. D. Weatherford and Wilma Dykeman, "Literature Since 1900," in Ford, ed., *Southern Appalachian Region*.

⁷⁹ Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, March 7, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁰ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 43.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

Appalachia for regional specialists and leaders that provided opportunities for viewing the area's poverty and issues and chances to meet with local leaders and residents.⁸²

Weatherford himself participated in several of these trips. In 1958 in connection with a conference on urban adjustment by the Council of the Southern Mountains, Weatherford led a five-day trip through mountain counties in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee.⁸³ Most of the participants were from the cities of Cincinnati, Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit, where the increased flow of Appalachian migrants were then settling. Weatherford exposed these visitors to a wide spectrum of mountain life in both rural and urban areas, including educational institutions, mining operations and towns, farms, churches, and industrial plants. The following year Weatherford, along with the aid of University of Kentucky rural sociologist James Brown, guided another group of northerners and midwesterners, this time primarily educators, law enforcement officers, and city leaders, through parts of eastern Kentucky and Tennessee.⁸⁴ In the process he supplemented their first-hand experience with recent findings from the SAS project. Overall, Weatherford wanted these men and women to develop an understanding and sympathy for Appalachian people, particularly when they returned to their respective communities and worked with them there. Weatherford was pleased when newspapers

⁸² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 219–221.

⁸⁴ "Invasion From The Mountains: Poverty the Main Spur Driving Migrants To North," July 20, 1959, newspaper clipping, folder 3604b, Weatherford Papers.; Mary Ellen Wolfe, "Mountain Leaders Working to Keep Their People From Moving North," July 22, 1959, Dayton *Journal Herald*, newspaper clipping, folder 3604b, Weatherford Papers; and Evelyn S. Stewart, "Hill People—Proud and God-Fearing," July 31, 1959, Detroit *Free Press*, newspaper clipping, folder 3604b, Weatherford Papers.

reported favorably on these tours, and he considered the articles an important achievement in changing public opinion in these northern and midwestern cities.⁸⁵

While it is difficult to assess the impact of these trips, the visit of a young man from Massachusetts in 1960 clearly influenced the trajectory reform took in this region in the coming years. That spring, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy went to West Virginia to campaign for the upcoming May Democratic primary.⁸⁶ This state was just emerging from a particularly cold and hard winter, and Kennedy was touched by his experiences with the poverty he observed among the coal miners and rural residents.⁸⁷ Kennedy's nomination was far from ensured at the time, and as a Catholic, winning West Virginia would be an important indicator that his religious faith would not be an impediment to his presidential run. On the night before the primary vote, May 10, 1960, Kennedy pledged West Virginians "If I'm nominated and elected president within sixty days of the start of my administration, I will introduce a program to the Congress for aid to West Virginia."⁸⁸ Kennedy won the state, and after being elected president he made strides to improve West Virginia and the greater Appalachian region through the Area Redevelopment Act in 1961 and the President's Appalachian Regional Commission in 1963.⁸⁹

Also influencing Kennedy's interest and bringing Appalachia's plight into the American spotlight was the publication of a book on the region in 1963. In that year Harry Monroe Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed*

⁸⁵ W. D. Weatherford, "Publication and Uses of Materials, Together With a Study of Agencies That May Be Interested in Implementing These Studies," (ca. 1961), folder 3593, Weatherford Papers.

⁸⁶ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 53–54.

⁸⁷ Drake, *History of Appalachia*, 173.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 54.

⁸⁹ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 59 and 72.

Region was released, becoming one of the most important works of the era on Appalachia. In this volume Caudill sketched the history of the Cumberland Plateau from frontier days through the present, particularly showing how “greed, environmental abuse, and government neglect” had ravaged this area.⁹⁰ Caudill emphasized that most of these issues resulted from outside influences like absentee mine owners; yet he also pointed out problems within mountain culture such as “ignorance, clannishness, and an eagerness to accept public relief” that played a part in the region’s current conditions.⁹¹ Caudill pleaded for government intervention on the scale of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Marshall Plan to bring development, jobs, housing, and education to Appalachia. *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* was extensively read at the time, inspiring a number of journalists to report further on Appalachia.⁹² Indeed, one of these pieces by New York *Times* writer Homar Bigart, made its way to President Kennedy in 1963. Sadly, Kennedy did not live much longer to enact changes in the region.

After Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson followed up on the former president’s commitment there. As part of his War on Poverty, Johnson gave particular attention to improving Appalachian economic conditions. One important piece of legislation he pushed through was the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, which established the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).⁹³ This department in turn created such programs as Headstart, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), Upward Bound (a high school dropout deterrence program), and Job Corps (similar to the

⁹⁰ Ronald D. Eller, “*Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, Harry Monroe Caudill,” in Gwendolyn Mink and Alice O’Connor, eds., *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics and Policy* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 507.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 66–67; and Drake, *History of Appalachia*, 174.

⁹³ Drake, *History of Appalachia*, 174–175.

New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps) Another accomplishment of Johnson's administration was the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a joint federal-state organization, which came into existence in 1965. This agency defined the region broadly, with Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, New York, Mississippi, and Ohio all receiving representation.⁹⁴ While the OEC focused primarily on educational and youth programs, the ARC supported building infrastructure, particularly roads, schools, and health care facilities.⁹⁵

In Weatherford's attention to Appalachia, he recognized that both federal and state governments would play an important part in improving the region. Writing to Wilma Dykeman in 1964, he acknowledged,

The economic need of the mountains is most pressing. The Governors of the Appalachian states are working at this faithfully. President Johnson has our Appalachian study report on his desk and is giving effective thought to it. We must find ways of cooperative efforts. We must open up the back valleys and coves with roads, we must get light manufacturing plants in, and we must help the little farmer get better pastorage, better breeds of stock, better markets and better knowledge, of how to make more out of his limited opportunities. It's a dark picture but I'm sure we can find ways out.⁹⁶

In 1961 Weatherford made unsuccessful efforts to meet with Kennedy in regard to these issues, and at this time he also worked with senators drafting legislation for the region.⁹⁷

Still, Weatherford was not sure that economic considerations would remedy all of Appalachia's troubles. Speaking at the second Appalachian Governors' Conference in

⁹⁴ Jean Haskell Speer, "Appalachian Region Commission, *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=A028>, accessed 12/21/2010.

⁹⁵ Drake, *History of Appalachia*, 175.

⁹⁶ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64," Weatherford family papers.

⁹⁷ W.D. Weatherford to Elizabeth Wyckoff, January 9, 1961, folder 3556, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to John J. Sparkman, January 27, 1961, folder 3555, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to John J. Sparkman, January 30, 1961, folder 3555, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Charles R. Younts, October 14, 1961, folder 3560, Weatherford Papers.

1961, he admitted that while new infrastructure and industry “were terribly important...they alone would not solve Appalachian problems.”⁹⁸ Weatherford went on to insist that “no real man wanted to raise his children in a community where the school was poor, the church was weak, and medical facilities were non-existent.”⁹⁹ For Weatherford, these institutions were equally as essential as jobs. Moreover, he felt the people of Appalachia needed a sense of value in themselves and optimism for the future. Writing to Dykeman in 1964, Weatherford declared, “the elemental need is to give new hope and new appreciation for his own dignity and worth to the mountain person.”¹⁰⁰ In short Weatherford envisioned a program for Appalachia that would bring new pride to its residents, with churches being at the forefront of reforming the region.

In 1962 another volume was published along with the overall study of southern Appalachia, this one highlighting religion’s place in the region. Entitled *Life and Religion in the Appalachian Region: An Interpretation of Selected Data from the Southern Appalachian Studies*, it was co-authored by Weatherford and Earl D. C. Brewer. The study included information gained from interviews with over 2,000 mountain households and 204 churches in seven states, with the first part of the book focusing on historical and current cultural conditions there and the remaining portion revealing statistics about the status of Christianity.¹⁰¹ These authors intended this volume to be a sort of study guide, to be used both within and outside the mountains by local

⁹⁸ Weatherford to Younts, October 14, 1961, folder 3560, Weatherford Papers.

⁹⁹ Weatherford to Younts, October 14, 1961, folder 3560, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁰⁰ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford, 3/21/64,” Weatherford family papers.

¹⁰¹ W. D. Weatherford and Earl D. C. Brewer, *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia: An Interpretation of Selected Data from the Southern Appalachian Studies* (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), 67.

congregations, denominations, women's groups, and other social agencies.¹⁰²

Weatherford hoped it would provide a benchmark of where things stood and what steps then could be taken for improvement.

Weatherford in these years viewed Appalachian churches on the whole as being highly "inefficient" and too conservative.¹⁰³ While he believed these congregations could be critical units to improving the region, he did not think the current state of religion there was satisfactory. For starters, he was concerned with the overall participation rates of mountaineers as well as their largely fundamentalist beliefs. Moreover, as Loyal Jones notes, Weatherford was often frustrated by those Appalachian congregations lacking business organization, with Jones recalling Weatherford's exasperation over "Why can't these local churches have a budget?"¹⁰⁴ Weatherford was also alarmed that many mountain clergy had little formal education, believing this "lack of training" contributed to their being "ultra conservative," which in turn led them to divide the world into sacred and secular spheres. Overall, Weatherford thought such a combination kept these pastors focused exclusively on saving souls and resulted in their congregations having "little interest in and little or no share in public responsibility."¹⁰⁵ Writing to Dykeman in 1966, he maintained his opinion that ministers and their flocks were not sufficiently attuned to their "responsibility" to others.¹⁰⁶ Passionately he stated,

The trouble is that so few churchmen see or even think about their responsibility to these needs. How few churches there are who even think of their having any responsibilities to the people surrounding them who are helpless in meeting these

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, ix, and 68.

¹⁰³ W. D. Weatherford to Mrs. G. H. Myers, March 3, 1959, folder 3436, Weatherford Papers. See also "Talk by Dr. Willis Duke Weatherford to Catholic Bishop Waters (and others) of the Raleigh, NC Diocese and Glenmary Missionary Order," circa 1961–1962, Weatherford Collection.

¹⁰⁴ Personal interview with Loyal Jones, November 4, 2009, Berea, Kentucky.

¹⁰⁵ "Notes by W. D. Weatherford," Weatherford family papers.

¹⁰⁶ W. D. Weatherford to Wilma Dykeman, November 8, 1966, folder 3593, Weatherford Papers.

simple needs of their existence. . . . When will the church leaders wake up and make their church constituency wake up?¹⁰⁷

In short, Appalachian Christianity did not meet Weatherford's standards for a socially engaged faith.

Scholars writing about Appalachian religion in recent years have taken issue with some of the attitudes reformers like Weatherford had about mountain churches.¹⁰⁸

Oftentimes figures like him came from mainline churches outside the region who sought to impose their conception of what "church" should be. Their more liberal view of Christianity in terms of theology and social involvement, together with certain middle-class and Victorian cultural priorities, contrasted with the style and practice of many Appalachian congregations. Loyal Jones notes that while these home missionaries were often well intentioned and spawned many improvements for the region, they frequently had difficulty seeing mountain people's "culture and faith in their time and place" as "legitimate."¹⁰⁹ Moreover these Christian reformers regularly treated their fellow believers with less than mutual respect, having a paternalistic attitude toward them. In Weatherford's case such a mind-set can be seen in his idea that Appalachian churches should share their facilities to reduce wasting resources by operating so many different buildings. Here, Weatherford's proposal failed to consider how these members would feel about this arrangement. Commenting on a similar plan by another Appalachian

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ For studies on Appalachian Christianity see Loyal Jones, "Mountain Religion: The Outsider's View," in John D. Photiadis, ed., *Religion in Appalachia: Theological, Social, and Psychological Dimensions and Correlates* (Morgantown: Center for Extension and Continuing Education, Division of Social and Economic Development, Office of Research and Development, West Virginia University, 1978), 401–407; Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Loyal Jones, *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and Bill J. Leonard, ed., *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands*, 210.

reformer, Jones added that while “This is a fine ideal. . . it doesn’t happen up the hollow any easier than it does on Main Street, U.S.A.”¹¹⁰ Weatherford also exhibited a certain amount of condescension toward mountain congregations when he spoke before a Catholic group in Raleigh, North Carolina, in the early 1960s. Here Weatherford proposed a plan to have Christians outside the region come into local communities and train ministers, while also providing supervision and financial support.¹¹¹ He seems to take it as a given that these local congregations would welcome such efforts. Nevertheless, it also should be noted that in these years Weatherford’s view that Appalachian churches were not operating as they should be was just part of his greater overall critique of American Christianity. At this same time he was also admonishing mainline denominations for being “rich, lazy and satisfied.”¹¹²

Weatherford’s emphasis on the churches—both in the mountains and in the South overall—represents a shift in the major religious institution he supported. Before the 1950s Weatherford had been most heavily invested in the YMCA, believing that it would be the critical organization for religion and social action in the South. Yet by the mid-century his faith in the Y had lessened, and from that period onward he placed his confidence in the church. Weatherford’s move was likely a response to his failed effort with the YMCA Graduate School, his disconnect from the administration of Blue Ridge by this point, and the general secularizing and lessening importance of the YMCA as a Christian organization by this time. After 1946, the Y did not figure into Weatherford’s plans for Appalachia.

¹¹⁰ Jones, “Mountain Religion,” 406.

¹¹¹ See “Talk by Dr. Willis Duke Weatherford to Catholic Bishop Waters (and others) of the Raleigh, NC Diocese and Glenmary Missionary Order,” circa 1961–1962, Weatherford collection.

¹¹² W. D. Weatherford to Elizabeth Wyckoff, January 8, 1961, folder 3556, Weatherford Papers.

But Weatherford did have a special vision for the churches within the mountains. In particular, Weatherford saw these organizations as possible “grassroots” agencies in Appalachian communities. He hoped that they would be sites where local residents organized to address their particular neighborhood issues. For example, programs might develop out of these churches that deterred high school students from dropping out.¹¹³ In the early-to-mid-1960s Weatherford also intended to enlist experts from religion and sociology to work in these areas and train indigenous leaders to confront their local problems. As Weatherford proposed such a “pilot project” in western North Carolina in 1965—that might later be expanded to all of southern Appalachia—he went to the North Carolina Fund, a new poverty-based organization.¹¹⁴ While their board of directors apparently “had real interest” in his plan, they did not accept his proposal, considering it “more rightly the province of the churches than of the Fund.”¹¹⁵ Weatherford, while slowing down in the next few years, would continue to deliberate on ways to use these religious bodies to improve Appalachian life.

Beyond his attempt to energize the churches in the Appalachian cause, Weatherford’s plans for the region also involved helping mountain residents maintain self respect. In particular he addressed the complex issue of how government support payments should be allocated. A 1964 meeting of the Council of the Southern Mountains

¹¹³ W. D. Weatherford to The Bay Foundation, Inc, May 3, 1965, folder 3564, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to George Esser, November 16, 1965, folder 3565, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Robert Walker, February 21, 1966, folder 3573, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁴ Weatherford to Esser, November 16, 1965, folder 3565, Weatherford Papers; and Weatherford to Walker, February 21, 1966, folder 3573, Weatherford Papers. For more on the North Carolina Fund see Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹¹⁵ George H. Esser to W. D. Weatherford, April 8, 1966, folder 3572 Weatherford Papers.

appears to have pushed Weatherford to tackle this concern more publicly.¹¹⁶ At that gathering, one of the speakers evidently proposed that the government should provide a living wage of \$3,000 per year to qualified persons.¹¹⁷ Weatherford challenged Robert Theobald, who made this suggestion, to flesh out how this money could be appropriated while still maintaining the receiver's "self respect," "individuality," and "dignity."¹¹⁸ Theobald apparently did not present Weatherford with a satisfactory answer, and Weatherford left the meeting struggling to envision a way out of this Appalachian welfare dilemma. After deliberation, Weatherford arrived at an idea. He suggested these recipients be required—in exchange for relief money—to give something back to society, through a form of moral, spiritual, educational, or motivational service. How such a system actually would play out remains unclear, but Weatherford considered this extremely vital, insisting audaciously, "Anything less than this will destroy the self respect of the recipient, and it probably would be better for them to starve than lose their self respect."¹¹⁹

The following year Weatherford became a little more specific about his proposal. Asked by reporter Beverly Wolter of the Winston-Salem *Journal and Sentinel* what could be done to meet this problem, he maintained that "A dole is no answer."¹²⁰ Weatherford went on to roughly sketch his idea which included giving a salary of \$300 per month out of government funds in payment for "service" that could be performed through such

¹¹⁶ W. D. Weatherford, "One Answer to Appalachia," p. 6, May 1964, *Berea Alumnus*, in folder 3502, Weatherford Papers. For an earlier consideration of this question see Thomas R. Ford to W. D. Weatherford, July 5, 1960, folder 3546, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁷ Weatherford, "One Answer," p. 6, folder 3502, Weatherford Papers.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* Weatherford idea seems very similar to an approach outlined by Thomas R. Ford in 1960. See Ford to Weatherford, July 5, 1960, folder 3546, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁰ Beverly Wolter, "Appalachia Poverty and a Work Service: Dr. Weatherford Offers a Plan," July 18, 1965, newspaper clipping, folder 3747, Weatherford Papers.

activities as working with schools and discouraging high school dropouts or serving sick and needy persons in domestic duties. In response Wolter commented that while this arrangement still remained rather “nebulous,” it also sounded a lot like “socialism,” to which Weatherford replied, “What if it is?”¹²¹ Although his plan was far from socialism, it certainly was very idealistic. Yet Weatherford went no further in explaining how his program would operate or how people would be held accountable.

Another project Weatherford prepared in these years was something he referred to as the “Appalachian Dozen.” This undertaking included publishing a series of books, both fiction and non-fiction, to help bring a renewed sense of self worth to Appalachian residents. These volumes were to be targeted primarily to inhabitants there, providing awareness of current conditions and inspiration to teachers, preachers, storekeepers, and Appalachian women to engage in the region’s social concerns.¹²² Weatherford also hoped this collection would “help Americans know who the Appalachian people are, what is their background, what their special contribution to American civilization has been and may yet be.”¹²³ This set included *The Southern Appalachian Region* (1962), *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia* (1962), Wilma Dykeman’s *The French Broad* (1955) and *The Tall Woman* (1962), Garland Hendricks’s *The Appalachian Sheppard* (1965), Jesse Stuart’s *The Thread that Runs So True* (1958), James Stokely’s *Bull-session in a Mountain Country Store* (never published), and Weatherford’s *Personal Elements in Religious Life* (1916), *Pioneers of Destiny* (1955), *Studies in Christian Experience*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² See “The Appalachian Dozen,” circa 1968, folder 3594, Weatherford Papers; “List of Supplemental Publications for Inspiration and Information on the Appalachian Mtns.,” folder 3594, Weatherford Papers; and “A Full Commentary on Appalachian People and Problems,” folder 3594, Weatherford Papers.

¹²³ “The Appalachian Dozen,” folder 3594, Weatherford Papers.

(1962), and *The Amazing Contribution of Appalachia to American Life* (never published). Weatherford's approach here was likely an outgrowth of his work on Appalachian literature in the 1962 survey, and he used money from the SAS budget to finance several of these pieces.¹²⁴ All in all, the "Appalachian Dozen" was very reminiscent of the "library" on race relations he put together in 1912 and 1915. The series also featured one other book by Dykeman, *The Prophet of Plenty*, a biography of Weatherford.

Weatherford and Dykeman had known each other since 1959. In that year she and her husband James Stokely were collaborating on a biography of Will W. Alexander, and in the process of verifying a story about Weatherford they sought him out at a conference he was attending in Tennessee.¹²⁵ From this initial meeting the two became close, particularly in their enthusiasm over Appalachian issues, and as they collaborated on the literature chapter for the regional survey. Indeed, it might be fair to say that Weatherford had finally met his match in someone who equaled his passion for the South and Appalachia. Assessing the two, Loyal Jones later described Dykeman as "one of the most enthusiastic and indomitable women I knew," and Weatherford as "the indomitable old man that never gave up."¹²⁶ By the time Weatherford and Dykeman crossed paths, the latter was already an acclaimed writer whose works had confronted major issues in

¹²⁴ Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, January 15, 1960, folder 3548, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Wilma Dykeman, June 4, 1960, folder 3548, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, January 28, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers; Elizabeth Wyckoff to W. D. Weatherford, July 12, 1965, folder 3571, Weatherford Papers; and Elizabeth Wyckoff to W. D. Weatherford, September 6, 1965, folder 3571, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁵ Wilma Dykeman, untitled speech at Weatherford Convocation, August 28, 1965, folder 3763b, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Elizabeth Wyckoff, February 8, 1959, folder 3541, Weatherford Papers. See also Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, *Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹²⁶ Personal interview with Loyal Jones, November 4, 2009, Berea, Kentucky.

civil rights and Appalachia.¹²⁷ In her career she would go on to publish nearly twenty books, thereby earning numerous honorary degrees, including the 1985 North Carolina Award for literature. In 1969 she joined Berea's board of trustees.¹²⁸ As a result of their initial encounter, subsequent friendship, and common purpose, Weatherford commissioned Dykeman to write *The Tall Woman* (1962), a fictional account of a mountain mother's influential role in local culture to be part of his "Appalachian Dozen."¹²⁹ Following this work, Weatherford planned for her to author one additional piece for the series, an imagined story of a man committed to the region to be entitled *Apostle to Appalachia*.¹³⁰ Weatherford must have envisioned it to be a kind of companion to *The Tall Woman*, using this man's story as an inspiration to mountaineers to seek what he thought was a better life. Yet Dykeman encouraged Weatherford to shift the project, insisting on writing a biography of him instead because she believed this approach "would make it more real and more powerful."¹³¹

Dykeman's book went through several name changes over the course of its development, revealing much about her and Weatherford's intended purpose for it. At various times it was called "A Prophet in the Mountains"; "An Apostle to Appalachia and Our Prophet of Plenty"; and "The Builder of a New Society (The Life Story of W. D.

¹²⁷ See Wilma Dykeman, *The French Broad* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955); and Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, *Neither Black nor White* (New York: Rinehart, 1957).

¹²⁸ See "Berea College: Board of Trustees Meeting, October 24, 1969," folder 3457a, Weatherford Papers.

¹²⁹ Dykeman to Weatherford, January 15, 1960, folder 3548, Weatherford Papers; and Weatherford to Dykeman, June 4, 1960, folder 3548, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁰ Weatherford to Dykeman and Stokely, January 28, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers; and Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, February 1, 1965, folder 3569, Weatherford Papers.

¹³¹ Weatherford to Dykeman and Stokely, January 28, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers.

Weatherford).”¹³² A short description of the first title read: “The story of a real leader dedicated to mountain people, meant to dignify mountain people in their own minds.”¹³³ *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W. D. Weatherford*, the book’s eventual name, was dedicated “to today’s youth—tomorrow’s leaders—to whom W. D. Weatherford pledged his talents, his energy, and the time of his life.”¹³⁴ Even though Dykeman covered his whole life, as these titles suggest, the essential function of her volume—as Weatherford and she had planned—was to bring attention to Appalachia and motivate its residents and those elsewhere.¹³⁵ It was a practical work of advocacy, one very much in the tradition of Weatherford’s other books.¹³⁶

The choice of the word “Plenty” held a particularly significant meaning within the context of the times. In 1966 the U. S. was in the midst of the War on Poverty in Appalachia and throughout the country. Dykeman intended the book’s focus on “plenty” to contrast with the term “poverty” that was so much in American public discourse.¹³⁷ For her, being poor meant something beyond people’s access to material possessions and opportunities which makes their lives difficult and painful. People can also be “poor in spirit,” a fact that can affect the wealthy and underprivileged alike. Throughout the text Dykeman used variations of both “poverty” and “plenty” extensively, even writing on the

¹³² “List of Supplemental Publications,” folder 3594, Weatherford Papers; Dykeman, untitled speech at Weatherford Convocation, August 28, 1965, folder 3763b, Weatherford Papers; and “A Full Commentary on Appalachian People and Problems,” folder 3594, Weatherford Papers.

¹³³ “List of Supplemental Publication,” folder 3594, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁴ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, [v].

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6; Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, December 11, 1966, folder 3897, Weatherford Papers; and Wilma Dykeman Stokely, “Dr. Weatherford: Prophet of Plenty Dies,” *Asheville Citizen*, newspaper clipping, Record Group No. 3.06, Box 1, Willis Duke Weatherford Jr. collection, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

¹³⁶ Not surprisingly Weatherford and Dykeman were also interested in having this biography used in schools in Appalachia as a “textbook.” See Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, September 6, 1969, folder 3915, Weatherford Papers.

¹³⁷ Wilma Dykeman to W. D. Weatherford, June 1, 1966, folder 3573, Weatherford Papers.

first page, “this is the story of [Weatherford’s] attack on poverty wherever he found it. It is also the record of his prophecy of the plenty which was, and is, available to a man or a nation.”¹³⁸ The book was optimistic, upbeat, and hopeful—all characteristics of its subject.

In accessing *Prophet of Plenty* it is important to remember that Weatherford commissioned Dykeman to write it and that he was directly involved in its production. While it was not originally his idea to have his life story put in print, he did pay her for the work and clearly helped as she gathered information on his life, speaking personally with her, providing written responses to her questions, and recommending people for her to interview. Dykeman and her husband together (at the time he was working on a tale about a mountain storekeeper for Weatherford which he never completed) were paid \$12,000 (\$1,000 for 12 months) to produce these works.¹³⁹ As Dykeman herself admitted, “This account of Weatherford’s work is neither definitive biography nor formal scholarship,” and while it remained credible, the book for the most part portrayed Weatherford in a positive manner.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Weatherford appears to have been quite pleased with the finished product, in the midst of his initial reading of it congratulating her for doing a “wonderful job.”¹⁴¹ Yet to what extent *Prophet of Plenty*, as well as the entire “Appalachian Dozen” project, had Weatherford and Dykeman’s desired effect on Appalachian residents and other readers remains unclear. Indeed, as several works were not completed, the set never sold as a package. Overall, those books that were published

¹³⁸ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 1.

¹³⁹ Weatherford to Dykeman and Stokely, January 28, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers; Elizabeth Wyckoff to Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, October 1, 1964, folder 3874, Weatherford Papers; and Elizabeth Wyckoff to W. D. Weatherford, July 12, 1965, folder 3571, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁰ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 6.

¹⁴¹ W. D. Weatherford to Wilma Dykeman, November 15, 1966, folder 3573, Weatherford Papers.

likely had a negligible impact; certainly they were much less influential than Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* at the time.

Another activity Weatherford undertook for Appalachia in his years at Berea is more easily quantified. Beginning in 1949 and lasting through the mid-1960s, Weatherford actively recruited students from western North Carolina to attend this school, as well as college in general.¹⁴² Taking time each year, usually in the month of January, he visited high schools in this region, going to as many as 60 in 1953.¹⁴³ Since the African American population was very small in this section of North Carolina, almost all of his attention was on the white schools, but there is evidence he may have also traveled to black institutions as well.¹⁴⁴ His basic approach included speaking before the senior class—sometimes the entire student body—about the importance of education and then encouraging those with a B or better average to go on for a higher degree. For those that could afford college he insisted they find a suitable school other than Berea for their interests. However, for students lacking the necessary financial resources for collegiate education, he directed them to apply to Berea because of its tuition-free policy and commitment to serving underprivileged Appalachian youth.¹⁴⁵ First and foremost, Weatherford's desire was for these youngsters to have an education, whether this took

¹⁴² Francis S. Hutchins to Bruce Barton, January 6, 1954, folder 3404, Weatherford Papers; and W. D. Weatherford to Martha W. Pride, March 8, 1966, folder 3455, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴³ "Schedule of Visits to Schools in Western North Carolina," 1958, folder 3483, Weatherford Papers; "Report of W. D. Weatherford," January 27, 1950, folder 3462, Weatherford Papers; Form letter to students, 1952, folder 3385, Weatherford Papers; W. D. Weatherford to Mrs. Max C. Fleischmann, November 20, 1953, folder 3395, Weatherford Papers; and Hutchins to Barton, January 6, 1954, folder 3404, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁴ W. D. Weatherford to Harry M. Arndt, October 29, 1959, folder 3433, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁵ See form letter to students, 1952, folder 3385, Weatherford Papers; and Weatherford to Fleischmann, November 20, 1953, folder 3395, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford seems true to his word that he only wanted financially disadvantaged youth to attend Berea. In 1959 after finding out that twin boys he had helped gain admission to Berea had "considerably more money" than he thought, he urged Berea admissions director to investigate their resources. See W. D. Weatherford to Allan Morreim, January 8, 1959, folder 3436, Weatherford Papers.

place at Berea or somewhere else. Weatherford could be very persistent, at times visiting student homes to talk with families and plead for their children's education.¹⁴⁶ His efforts would have an influence on the area, with 46 students from Buncombe County alone enrolled at Berea in 1956.¹⁴⁷

Several success stories from his endeavors stand out. One young woman from Nantahala High School in North Carolina met Weatherford on one of his recruiting trips in 1954.¹⁴⁸ According to Weatherford she apparently had an A average and was "more eager about the possibility of college than almost any person I ever met."¹⁴⁹ The girl's family (there were seven total) lived on \$600 a year. Berea ultimately accepted her, and in 1957 Weatherford encountered the young woman at the Conference of the Southern Mountains in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where she was attending as a student delegate. She surprised him as he was eating breakfast, and in the process of their visit, credited him for her being at Berea.

Another student, Billy Edd Wheeler, also was influenced by Weatherford to attend the college. Wheeler would become a distinguished songwriter, musician, and playwright in the 1960s and onward, writing such country hits as "Jackson" (for which June and Johnny Cash won a Grammy in 1967) and "The Coward of the County" (a song Kenny Rogers made famous in 1980).¹⁵⁰ Attending Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina, in 1953, Wheeler met Weatherford as the latter was apparently going "door-to-door" through the dorm, encouraging students to get a four-

¹⁴⁶ Calvin Jackson Thomas to Allan Morreim, August 14, 1953, folder 3392, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁷ "Students Enrolled in Berea College From Buncombe County, North Carolina," 1956, folder 3419, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁸ Untitled letter, April 29, 1957, folder 3427, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ George Brosi, "Versatile is Billy Edd Wheeler," *Appalachian Heritage* 36 (Winter 2008), 20–23. This issue had a special section focused on Wheeler.

year degree at Berea.¹⁵¹ Wheeler went on to the Kentucky college, graduating there in 1955. He later would attend Yale Drama School in 1962, and Weatherford, who had maintained an interest in him, would send him several hundred dollars to aid in his tuition costs.¹⁵² Ever the advocate of education at high quality schools, Weatherford was dismayed when he had heard Wheeler might have to withdraw from Yale because he could not meet his expenses, so he gave Wheeler a “gift” of \$250 to keep him there.¹⁵³ Wheeler later described Weatherford as being “like a hummingbird, always in motion and doing things.”¹⁵⁴ It was a fitting image.

Weatherford also engaged in several other ventures that benefited Berea as well as mountain residents. In 1964 he helped fund a program providing clothing and shoes for school children in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee, with the idea that making these necessities available would help keep students in the classroom.¹⁵⁵ In these years people also sought Weatherford’s advice on specific issues in local communities regarding poverty and education. One situation related to a nineteen-year-old young man from Tennessee, recently orphaned, who was trying to attend the public schools while still work full-time.¹⁵⁶ A teacher there, Mary Phillips Kirby-Smith, inquired of Weatherford if there were any “resource for further education for this boy in his

¹⁵¹ Brosi, “Versatile is Billy Edd Wheeler,” 21.

¹⁵² Personal interview with Billy Edd Wheeler, September 8, 2009, Black Mountain, North Carolina. See also W. D. Weatherford to Billy Edd Wheeler, September 25, 1961, folder 3854, Weatherford Papers. Weatherford wrote, “I am deeply concerned that you shall have the fullest opportunity, for I think you have some real genius and I’d like to see it expressed.”

¹⁵³ W. D. Weatherford to Emily Ann Smith, February 7, 1962, folder 3445, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁴ Personal interview with Billy Edd Wheeler, September 8, 2009, Black Mountain, North Carolina.

¹⁵⁵ “Report on Shoes and Clothing Expenditures,” April 13, 1964, folder 3563, Weatherford Papers; Elizabeth R. Wyckoff to Claude R. Collins, January 6, 1964, folder 3563, Weatherford Papers; and Mary Phillips Kirby-Smith to W. D. Weatherford, February 2, 1964, folder 3563, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Kirby-Smith to Weatherford, February 2, 1964, folder 3563, Weatherford Papers.

particular circumstances?”¹⁵⁷ What became of this teenager is not known, but in light of Weatherford’s commitment to such persons, it is likely he tried to do something. During this same time Weatherford also manifested his dedication to Berea through a gift of \$15,000 to establish the Weatherford and Hammond Mountain Collection of books at the Berea library.¹⁵⁸ People and knowledge always remained his priorities.

Weatherford maintained his devotion to Appalachia until the end of his life, slowing only in the very last years. His secretary from Berea, Elizabeth Wyckoff, noted that in 1965, at the age of ninety, he was still spending “16 hours a day” on these concerns.¹⁵⁹ As with his earlier focus on race relations, Weatherford continued trying to transform attitudes and perceptions primarily by working through religious organizations. Weatherford wanted people outside of Appalachia to have a respect for these people, and he also desired for those within the region to develop a new pride in themselves. His vision was to create a brighter future for this area, a vital part of which included lessening the “[i]ndividualism in the mountains” and instead, inspiring a greater “sense of community responsibility.”¹⁶⁰ At times his plans were unrealistic and hardly feasible. His methods could also be paternalistic, particularly in those cases where he thought he knew a better way for congregations to worship and operate their churches. In the big scheme of Appalachian history, Weatherford stands in the long tradition of missionaries who made this region their cause. While he failed to initiate any large structural changes, it must be admitted that he did have a positive impact on the lives of many individuals

¹⁵⁷ Kirby-Smith to Weatherford, February 2, 1964, folder 3563, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁵⁸ W. D. Weatherford to Francis S. Hutchins, January 10, 1964, folder 3449, Weatherford Papers. William A. Hammond was a businessman from Xenia, Ohio.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Wyckoff to Gilbert Osofsky, August 5, 1965, folder 3453, Weatherford Papers.

¹⁶⁰ “Notes by W. D. Weatherford,” Weatherford family papers.

there. Perhaps his greatest achievement for Appalachia was in helping to draw national awareness to this section of the country and its people's needs during a very difficult period

Conclusion

W. D. Weatherford's long life came to an end February 21, 1970, in Berea, Kentucky.¹ At the time he was living with his son (who by then had become the president of Berea) and his family. A memorial service was held near the college to honor Weatherford, with his funeral taking place at the Methodist Church in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Afterwards Weatherford was buried on a special plot alongside his wife Julia McRory (who had died in 1957) at the Blue Ridge Assembly. A massive bolder marked their graves, with the following inscription for Weatherford:

WILLIS DUKE WEATHERFORD 1875–1970. FOUNDER, BUILDER AND
PRESIDENT OF BLUE RIDGE, 1906–1944, MAN OF GOD AND SERVANT
OF MEN, LIFE LONG STUDENT, LOVER OF YOUTH AND FRIEND OF
ALL RACES. MAN OF SOCIAL PASSION AND FAITH IN GOD WHO
TAUGHT THE SACREDNESS OF PERSONS AND THE DIGNITY OF
LABOR.²

Like all people Weatherford was a man shaped and limited by the times in which he lived. Yet he was also a man ahead of them for much of his life. In the context of the South in the early twentieth century his liberal views on race and religion and his advocacy of education placed him out in front of many of his contemporaries. Over the course of his career Weatherford channeled his unusual energy and drive to take on projects in the YMCA, race relations, and the Appalachian region. He maintained an extraordinary faith in the power of education to bring about change, always focusing on

¹ "Weatherford, Sr. Dead After Many Years of Service," March 7, 1970, *Pinnacle*, newspaper clipping in Record Group No. 9, Box 1, folder 1, W. D. Weatherford collection, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

² Capitalized on tombstone. See Weatherford gravestone, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, North Carolina. See also Paul M. Limbert, "A Synopsis of the Life and Times of Dr. W. D. Weatherford," August, 1979, p. 7, Record Group No. 9, Box 1, folder 2, W. D. Weatherford collection, Special Collections & Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

training, study groups, conferences, and educational efforts. At times his plans were hardly feasible on a large scale, particularly in his call for mountain welfare recipients to perform community activities in exchange for relief payments. At other points, his proposals were perhaps too idealistic, as he often hoped that his books would inspire change. After being at the forefront of southern liberalism in the 1910s he managed to keep pace through the early 1930s but fell behind after that period. From 1912 to 1945 he directed several institutions, and his struggles to push them in progressive directions were always tempered by his pragmatic efforts to insure their survival. In the years following 1945, while continuing his engagement in the issues of race, religion, and the Appalachian region, his methods became increasingly outdated.

One who involves themselves in reform always runs the risk of being criticized in such a way for their work. While there is much Weatherford can be faulted for, one should not work from the assumption that he had to undertake the activities that he did. Most white southerners did not stand against the status quo in these years. Weatherford's story is significant because it helps us understand why those white southern liberals who did, failed to go further in their critique of society in this period. Although it is easy to recognize their shortcomings in comparison to contemporary times, it is unfair to judge them by present standards. While clearly an element of racism on their part played a factor in their actions, other concerns too figured into why they held back.

In particular Weatherford's life and actions show what remained possible at this time in the South and reveals the importance of understanding someone within their context and circumstances. For Weatherford, particularly on the subject of race in the years before 1950, it was only feasible for him to go so far without sacrificing the

institutions in which he led, losing the influence he had, and even putting himself and his family at some physical risk. Weatherford walked a fine line between trying to live up to his Christian ideals about the value of all persons and doing what was realistic.

Nevertheless, the consequences he faced changed over time, and it became easier for him to do and say certain things. Weatherford can be judged more critically for not pushing harder as these options began opening up.

Weatherford and other white liberals were also limited by the fact that the South they hailed from had a weak tradition of reform and social mindedness from which they could pull, keeping the scope of their critiques within certain boundaries. In particular for Weatherford this past made it difficult for him to criticize the structural issues that contributed to the region's problems of racism and poverty. Ironically, it seems that while Personalism brought Weatherford into his recognition of the plight of African Americans and those of the Appalachian region, this philosophy also likely inhibited his progressivism. This school of thought's heavy focus on the individual perhaps blurred his ability to see the importance of addressing Jim Crow and market capitalism's exploitive elements. Like many other white liberals of this period, Weatherford's Christian motivations were also mixed with a sense of paternalism for those they tried to "help." Weatherford thought that middle-class and Victorian values could and should be applied to all people, thus bringing about what he thought would be a better society. Weatherford trusted that humans were rational, and if men and women just had awareness—brought on by education—then the problems of the day would work themselves out *gradually*. Particularly on the subject of African American civil rights,

his gradualism was influenced by the fact that he personally did not suffer discrimination in day-to-day life. He did not feel the need for more urgency.

Yet even within all the boundaries that Weatherford operated, he still made notable achievements for his time, most clearly seen in his race relations work in the 1910s and 1920s. Weatherford also influenced generations of students who attended Blue Ridge through the 1940s as well as students at the YMCA Graduate School, Fisk University, and Berea College. Indeed for some of these youngsters their exposure to Weatherford proved pivotal in pointing them in progressive directions, particularly in regard to racial issues. Although Weatherford attempted to be a scholar and would like to have been one, his books and academic work never reached a highly analytical, rigorous level. Indeed, despite his interest in being an intellectual, his greatest talents did not lay with the world of the mind. Weatherford's supreme abilities were in administration—inspiring creative and large projects and organizing and keeping them going. At times, however, he became so invested in some of his endeavors that he curtailed the very progressive social work that had brought him to create these places.

Weatherford continued his engagement in social issues through his early nineties. Besides what appears to have been a sincere interest in the concerns of African Americans, people of the Appalachian region, and the state of Christianity, it seems that his work provided a way to deal with the pain in his personal life. In the years after the loss of his first wife and daughter, he threw himself into YMCA work, the building of Blue Ridge, and the issue of race relations. Indeed, Weatherford may even have raised his voice on the plight of southern blacks because of the fact that he did not have to consider the repercussions of such work on his family. Weatherford's second wife went

through two periods of illness, the second one slowly paralyzing and debilitating her.³ Although clearly devoted to her, perhaps staying so busy helped him find some purpose in life amid all the chaos he experienced. As a Christian man, how he reconciled these tragedies with his faith is unclear. It appears he simply continued on, staying active and never coming to any definite conclusions on the spiritual questions.

Through all his life Weatherford was a liberal, optimistic in progress and the belief that education and inspiration would change people who in turn would improve the world. Partly as recognition of his educational efforts for the South and Appalachia, Berea College and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill both bestowed honorary doctorates on Weatherford.⁴ Indeed, as Rupert Vance recommended Weatherford to the UNC Committee of Honorary Degrees in 1961, he made an apt comment. He wrote, "it is difficult for me to think of a man of our region to whom a university education meant more or one who has been able to do more with his education over a long lifetime in many fields"⁵ Weatherford's achievements were grounded in the opportunities his higher education and subsequent studies had made available to him. He expected that knowledge would also prove similarly helpful to others.

³ For obituary of Julia McCrory Weatherford see "Sunday Services At Blue Ridge for Mrs. Weatherford," *Black Mountain News*, newspaper clipping, Oct. 10, 1957, folder 3747, Weatherford Papers.

⁴ Degree citation, June 6, 1955, Record Group 9, Box 1, folder 1, Weatherford collection.

⁵ Rupert B. Vance to The Committee on Honorary Degrees, October 27, 1961, folder 3854, Weatherford Papers.

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